

ABENIKI
CALDWELL

BY
CAROLYN WELLS

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Abeniki Caldwell

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A Burlesque Historical Novel

By

CAROLYN WELLS

Illustrated with numerous engravings
printed from the original wood blocks



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TO
LAURA FITHIAN JONES

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CHAPTER I

THE NAPOLEON FEATHER

WOE betide us, — all is lost !”

These words, uttered in an ominous, despairing shriek, pierced on mine ear with prophetic force, and I knew my glorious hopes were doomed to disappointment.

“Ha !” I thought silently to myself ; “who hath spoken ? Who, with a bold disregard of time and place, hath dared thus to utter his fateful conviction ?” I glanced cautiously about me.

The scene was a dazzling one, and right merry withal. The spacious ball-room, hung with posy garlands and twinkling with a myriad wax-lights, formed a fitting field for many a gay bud and blade who danced away the hours all unwitting of their approaching doom. Ah, thus had there been a sound of revelry by night when the Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold, and *sic semper tyrannis*.

I hesitated for the millionth part of a second, and then, for I was ever impetuous, I dashed

[1]

[1]

across

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across the room and seated myself in a red velvet armchair. Red velvet, did I say? Red! nay, by my troth, 't was blue, — blue as the violets nodding by the mere; blue as the noble blood that coursed through the royal veins of Francis, England's greatest king.

It was foolhardy, that mad dash across the apartment; but as I had foreseen, the manœuvre outwitted my enemies, and, all aglow with satisfaction, I addressed myself to Lady Alys Allardyce, who gazed at me over her peacock-feather fan with eyes of not unfathomable meaning.

“Hist!” said she, lifting a warning forefinger, “listen thou, but speak no word.”

“Aye, madam,” I murmured in return, for I was ever obedient; “I am dumb before thee; thine shall be the discourse, thine the explanation. Mine is it silently and humbly to obey thy orders, even though they lead through Danger to Death. At thy bidding I embrace the direst Danger; at thy behest I rush eagerly to darkest Death.



"At thy bidding I embrace the direst Danger!"

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Queen of my heart, accept the proffered aid of thine humblest servant and give me the straight tip."

"'Tis well said," quoth Lady Alys Allardyce ; and in silence I proceeded to adjust my purple velvet cloak, which hung in graceful folds over my white satin doublet slashed with cloth-of-gold.

"But," said my ill-fated companion, and her clarion-like voice sank to a faint falsetto, "the time is ripe ; yet 'tis an evil hour when I, a daughter of the House of Harlech, shall betray such gruesome secrets to an alien ear."

"And shall the vaulted chamber remain forever locked?" I cried.

"Alas, no," she answered, "the Curse of the Clurichaune must fall — must fall!"

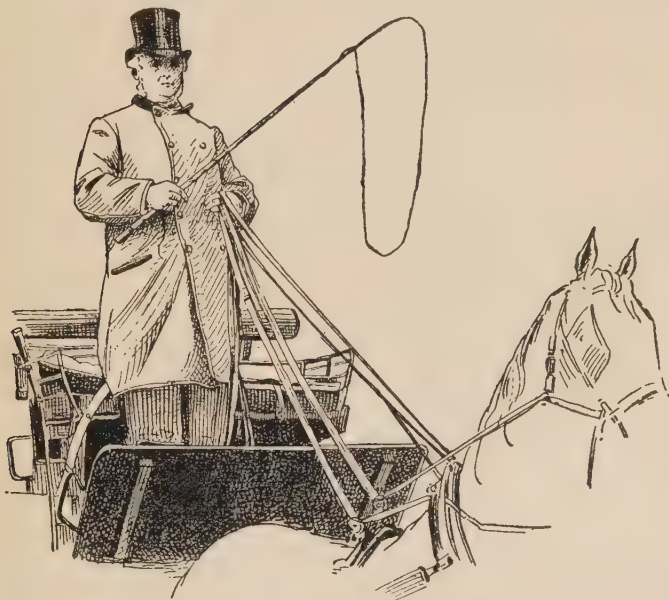
She spoke the last words with a Cassandra-like look that sent shivers to my spine, but I replied, —

"The Curse of the Clurichaune will fall, but only after the Cyprian scorpion shall have strewn

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the desert with the bones of his traitorous-hearted victims."

This moved her, and I looked up to see the



"The sound of wheels and the clatter of horses' hoofs"

Lady Alys smiling at me from the other side of the room.

Shivering with cold, I drew my plaid more closely about me and strode onward across the

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Scottish moor. The night was dark, and the storm came in fitful gusts, bending the old sycamores until they snapped from their stems and lay prone in the dense shadows of the forest.

My heart was filled with a black bitterness of woe, and ever in my ear a demon seemed relentlessly to hiss, "Revenge! Revenge!"

I had traversed perhaps a dozen leagues of misty moorland when I heard a sound behind me.

Grasping my rapier, I looked back, but I saw nothing, so dark was the night.

'T was only by listening intently I heard the sound of wheels and the clatter of horses' hoofs on the asphalt.

"Who comes?" I cried, as I valiantly drew sword, and prepared to defend my life against hostile attack.

A piercing shriek was the only answer.

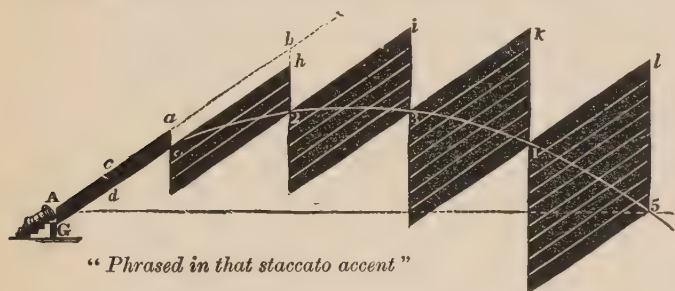
But such a shriek! It made my very heart stand still with mingled joy and grief.

For it was a noble, educated, aristocratic shriek; a polished, cultured shriek; a gentle,

[6] refined,

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refined, musical, and altogether-to-be-admired shriek. Such a shriek, in fact, as could proceed only from the ruby lips and pearly teeth of a fair damsel in distress. Surely some beauteous maid of noble birth had exercised her patrician lungs in bewailing some troubles of her own.



And, again, her mishap or misfortune, if mishap or misfortune it were, was dire, sudden, and unexpected.

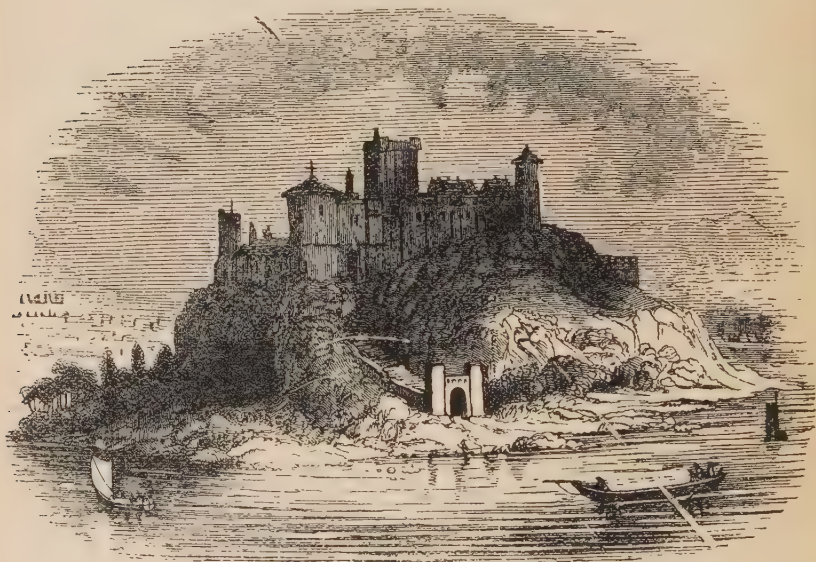
For the shriek, though of enchanting sweetness of tone, was pitched in that high key, and phrased in that staccato accent which always betokens fear, terror, or distress.

By a series of swift mental computations relating to the square of the sound plus the

[7] distance,

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distance, I arrived at the conclusion that the beautiful unfortunate must be exactly two miles



“ The castle-gard at Coningsburgh ”

and a half away from me in a northeasterly direction.

“ By the helmet of St. Swibert ! ” I exclaimed, “ the prowess of this single arm shall serve to rescue suffering Beauty from aught that may

THE NAPOLEON FEATHER

assail," and in tones of hope and reassurance I called to the unknown Fair One:—

"Fear not; a sword and lance are at thy service, O Damsel in distress! I will protect thee."

I paused only to gird my gabardine more closely round me, and then set off hot-foot for the scene of carnage.

There are few more imposing bits of scenery in all France than the castle-yard at Coningsburgh, where, well defended by walls and ditches, rises the ancient edifice, which was, previous to the Conquest, a residence for the royal kings of England.

Eagerness and excitement acted as wings to my feet, and I fairly flew across the moor, and arrived on the spot just in time to see a coach and four come tearing madly round a turn in the road.

The horses galloped at such a pace that the coach rocked from side to side; the postillions, pale with fright, shook in their saddles, while

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the outriders clapped spurs to their horses and disappeared round the edge of the cliff.

The coach was a brave one, gilded and painted in the style of Louis XIV., and the servants' liveries betokened a house of rank.

But ere I could more than glance at the fair, frightened face in the coach window, I perceived the cause of the hubbub to be a dozen or more attacking brigands, who on coal-black stallions pursued the fleeing coach.

"Halt!" I cried in stentorian tones, and held up my right hand with a menacing gesture.

The chief of the brigands advanced with a bold front, but I thought I detected a quiver of his left eyelash.

"Varlet! who art thou?" he cried, and lunged at me with his naked sword.

"I am Claude Kildare," I replied, "and right dearly shalt thou pay for daring to attack a Kildare of Kildare."

So saying, I dashed at him, and ere he might so much as wink an eye, I sent my sword
[10] through



“The coach was a brave one”

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through his heart, and drew back the flashing weapon dripping with the fiend's gore.

A yell of rage broke from his companions.

Roused to fury by the death of their chief, they attacked me with cries of vengeance and I had great to-do to parry all their thrusts at once.

But by a clever bit of sword-play I killed two of the brutes and struck the swords from the hands of three others.

Then with my left hand I fired my revolver six times in quick succession. This did for six more, after which I had only four to contend with.

Infuriated to the verge of frenzy, these demons in human shape flew at me.

One clutched my throat, but with a swift, clean cut I severed his arm, and then turned sharply on the others who were attacking me from behind.

"Come on!" I cried, for my spirit was roused, and another glimpse of the fair face at the coach window urged me on to grand-stand play.



“So saying, I dashed at him”

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They came on, since I insisted, and one behind another approached me with fell intent.

“Dogs!” I cried, and with a blood-curdling yell of triumph, I ran my trusty sword straight through the five,—aye, spitted the rogues as a cook runs a skewer through reed-birds.

They fell, weltering in their own gore, and then, resuming my courtly air, I turned to the damsel in the coach. I bowed before her, sweeping the ground with my plumed chapeau, and said simply: “Lady of the Starry Hair, Glory of Three Realms, if that my trifling aid hath shown thee aught of my devotion, grant me but one glance of thy Heaven-beaming eye, that the memory may be to my future life a fountain of exhaustless joy.”

“Nay, bold cavalier,” said the lady, “though in no wise do I underrate the assistance thy good sword hath rendered me, yet I am the Princess Berenice of Bois-Bracy, and the daughters of my house may not so much as glance upon one of lower birth and less boodle.”



"I had great to-do to parry all their thrusts at once"

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Chagrined and humiliated beyond words, I exclaimed: "Ha! how report hath lied! Full oft have I heard of the beauty of the Princesses of Bois-Bracy, but even through thy thick veil of black bombazine can I see thy hard-featured and ill-favored countenance."

The ruse was successful. With a slow sudden gesture, the Lady Berenice flung aside the bamboozling bombazine and disclosed such marvellous beauty as was never seen, save and except in advertisements of certain soaps and dentifrices.

Oh, that face! that face that gazed out from the coach window as from a frame of gold! Heaven forbend that I should attempt to describe its glorious beauty! The pen of a Watteau were all too poor to give even a faint inkling of those angelic features.

The pure Greek profile outlined a classic brow and a nose which Mr. Micawber might have waited for; while the fair cheeks were like new pink satin pincushions.



"They came on, since I insisted"

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Masses of golden hair rose from the ivory temples like clouds of incense, and the lips of carven coral might well have served as a model for Cupid's bow.

All this I saw ere the downcast eyes were raised, but when the dark-fringed eyelids lifted and the Orient orbs of Lady Berenice thrilled to mine own, I knew that my life had at last begun. For love is life, and they be not alive who be not alove.

Still 'neath the spell of that glistening glance, I opened the coach door and my lady stepped forth.

Till then I had seen but her face ; now I perceived that her form was equally fair and noble. Tall as an Amazonian goddess, yet not too tall to be called *petite*, her straight, arrow-like figure was full of graceful curves.

Her robe was of orange wool, with a kirtle of pale crimson silk looped at the side. Her outer garment, or toga, was of maroon mohair with gilt fringe. Bracelets of beaten gold adorned her



"The pure Greek profile"

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beautiful arms, which were bare to the shoulder, and on her feet were sandal-wood sandals.

“Most Radiant Blossom from the Garden of Paradise,” I began, for I was ever plain and simple of speech, “behold before thee thy humble grovelling slave, whose only greatness is his unbounded devotion to thee and to thy service. Goddess, accept my homage; grant only that I may bow in the dust before thee, and when thou liftest thy dainty foot, oh, graciously permit that I may get it in the neck.”

The Lady Berenice was touched, but bravely concealing her agitation, she whispered, —

“An thou lovest me, drive me post-haste to the Inn of the Royal Rogue, over Borneilshire way.”

“Pride of the Universe, I live but to obey,” quoth I, as I handed Milady into her coach, touching her fingers awesomely, for who was I that this great honor should come to me?

But as the Lady Berenice glided into her cushioned nest, something fell to the ground from the folds of her garments.



“Goddess, accept my homage”

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Only two or three tiny, almost imperceptible fragments, yet as I saw them, my heart stood still in my breast, and then beat fiercely with a mad passion which I could not quell.

Anger, wrath, indignation, resentment, bitterness, animosity, exasperation, rage, fury, pique, umbrage, dudgeon, acerbity, virulence, and spleen strove for mastery in my infuriated brain.

Not for me this fair Marvel of Maidenliness, not for me this Miracle of Magnificence ; and with a horrisonous groan, wrung from the very subway of my aching, breaking heart, I forcefully brought down my heavy heel and ground deep in the dust those three grains of rice.

CHAPTER II

THE POISONED HANDKERCHIEF

HIGH toward the blue-vaulted heavens waved the silvery branches of the cypress-trees. Drifting blossoms fell from the brambles, and, blown by the west wind, scampered across the heath toward the setting sun.

The frowning Palisades, crowned with their Autumn foliage as with a wreath, looked down upon the peaceful Hudson with an air of mingled protection and superiority.

Far to the south, the magnolia groves nestled among the hills of the Carolinas, and their waxen blossoms flashed in the pale moonlight with an eerie beauty all their own.

The reapers paused, and as the morning broke in unclouded splendor o'er the peaks of Darien, the mist of a dismal February evening was spreading its humid veil over the line of low sandhills between Lochaber and Liddesdale.

The verdure fairly rioted in the wild exuberance of early Springtime, and the freshly washed

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Day seemed to break forth in a glad, sweet smile that had been ripening for years. But the gayety of Nature struck no answering chord in the sooty heart of Claude Kildare.



"The frowning Palisades"

Slamming the door of Lady Berenice's coach until it seemed as if she must needs lose her balance, her angry cavalier sprang with one bound to the coachman's box, and gathering up the ribbons started the six startled steeds off at a mad gallop.



"Her angry cavalier sprung with one bound to the coachman's box"

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By the bones of St. Dunstan, what a ride it was! The horses scarce touched ground at all between their pounding jumps, and the foam fairly flew from their fangs.

On, on, across the miry dunes,—on, Claude Kildare! spur thy horses through brake and brush, lash them o'er ditch and gorge; bravely balance the reeling vehicle, now on one wheel, now on another,—and, by the Pibroch of St. Winibald, thou shalt outstrip the pursuing hordes and win fair fame, forsooth, by thy high venture.

Within the coach the Lady Berenice lolled indolently on her satin cushions.

“Ha!” she said to herself, “methinks peril attendeth.”

With a faint interest manifest in their dark depths, the lovely eyes turned a glance of mild inquiry upon her new-found charioteer.

“Now, marry beshrew me!” cried the daughter of a hundred earls, “but the knight hath a marvellous skill. An a man can drive eight prancing steeds while he beareth his shield on his left arm,



“ Joseph McCann ”

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and holdeth a cocked revolver in his right, I need fear me no fears."

And so, content of her safety, the beautiful Lady Berenice sank into a gentle slumber, little dreaming of the dark and deadly plots that seethed in the throbbing brain of Claude Kildare.

Thus they rode on, and as the sun's dazzling disc dropped darkling into the horizon, they arrived at the postern gate of the Golden Grasshopper.

"Alight, O, Fair but False," quoth Claude Kildare, throwing open the coach door; and with a firm, haughty step the Lady Berenice alit.

From the Inn, behold advancing, with a fat, unctuous waddle, Joseph McCann, this twelve years Keeper of the Golden Grasshopper.

His hostelry was marked by the rude simplicity of its period, and its façade of white marble rose unostentatiously toward the blue heavens to the height of twenty-two stories.

A simple flight of white marble steps, carpeted with plain red velvet, led to the main entrance.



“‘I will await thee,’ he murmured”

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Herr McCann, though now in his thirty-seventh year come Michaelmas, had a hasty and choleric temper and was greatly slow-witted withal.

His long yellow hair was parted amidships, and fell on either side his head down to his shoulders, while a steely glitter was in his either eye.

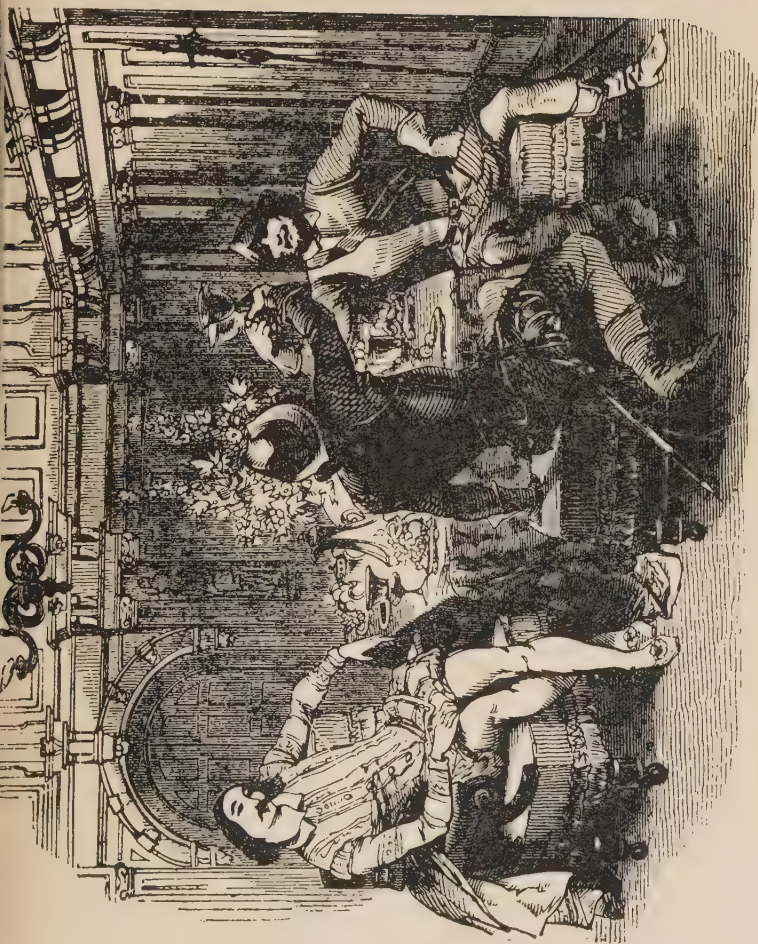
His dress was very sumptuous and magnificent. A scarlet tunic hung from his left shoulder, disclosing a green doublet edged with ermine.

“Odsbodikins, fair strangers,” he cried, “come in, and right welcome be. How are ye named?”

“I am Gaston K. Waldemar,” said Claude Kildare, “and this lady is my mother, Mrs. Waldemar.”

This statement was a lying falsehood, and Lady Berenice knew it, but awed by Kildare’s menacing glance, she said no word.

“Give this lady a suite of rooms,” continued Claude, “the finest your house affords, or, by the hammer of St. Dubric, I’ll break every skull of your head. Where is the lift?”



"Our hero entered the Gothic grill-room and flung himself at table"

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"This way, my lord," replied the Innkeeper, trembling like an aspic leaf, and he preceded his guests along the electric-lighted palm-corridor.

Claude Kildare strode in the direction indicated and Lady Berenice glided silently by his side. He clasped her fair hand at parting.

"I will await thee," he murmured, and his voice was as the cooing ring-dove's, "at nine o' the clock, by the moon-dial in the rose-garden."

The Lady Berenice uttered no word, but she flashed on Kildare an eloquent glance which seemed to say, "Naught shall keep me from the tryst; I will be there unless perchance it should rain."

Ah, little thought the fair Lady Berenice that already the knell of her happiness had tolled, already the memory of her future was menaced by poisoned shafts fired from the guns of envy, hatred, and malice.

Claude Kildare raised his head, and with a smile that dispelled the lowering clouds from

THE POISONED HANDKERCHIEF

his brow said gently: "Gramercy, good yeoman, and now hast ale in thy vaults?"

"Aye, my lord," quoth the Innkeeper, "prime ale and wine of the best, long kept in store for such as thou. Ho, Varlets, a stoup of Malvoisie!"

His command was obeyed by a passing lackey, and our hero entered the Gothic grill-room and flung himself at table.

The crowd of merry roysterers carousing there paid no heed to his entrance, but continued boisterously to brawl a roundelay.

"Here's to Hilarity,
Jolly good fellows we.
Fill up your stein with Rhenish wine
And drink with me.

"Drink to the death of care,
Drudgery, and despair;
Drink to a life with Laughter rife
And free as air.

"Here in content we sit,
Bothering not a bit,
Though in the world's mendacious mart
Men fret and smart;

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“Though in a morbid mood,
Greedy for solitude,
Anchorite grim in cloister dim
May sit and brood.

“We have the better lot,
Here from all fetters free ;
Happy with Pipe and Pot,
Pledged to Hilarity.
Ha, ha, ha !”

But of a sudden their jollity was interrupted by the entrance of a sinister-looking, ill-favored man.

O'er his beetling brows was pulled low a black fur cap. Around him was wrapped a long black cloak, from the folds of which gleamed a hidden rapier.

With angry frown and surly scowl he said, —

“A truce to this fooling! Cease these loud-mouthed japes and jibes! Hath not the cause been neglected these many moons? Are not our spears rusty in their scabbards? Do not our truncheons hang idle on the walls? Go to! These things must not be! Boleslaus, dog of



"A sinister-looking, ill-favored man"

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a slave, get a move on thee and arm for the conflict!"

"By the Great Horn Spoon," quoth he addressed as Boleslaus, "that will I not do. Only yestreen Bertran of the Red Nose played on me a most scurvy trick. What did he? This did he! When that I would ——"

"Hah, sirrah," interrupted a burly youth, springing to his feet, "darest thou denounce me? Have a care!"

"Spine of a Lobster!" roared the latest-entered one, "cease this buffoonery! This hall hath more the air of the den of a brawling brotherhood than the abode of peaceful gentlemen. Make short shift of thy quarrel, that we may dine orderly. But, soft, — an alien is here! Thy name, sir, and thy business?"

As he spoke, the fierce-looking intruder advanced upon Claude Kildare, and brandished his rapier in our hero's face.

"Swashbuckle me no swashbucklers, thou miserable caitiff!" cried Kildare. "Know that

THE POISONED HANDKERCHIEF

I am a Kildare of Kildare, and he who tastes but once of my cutlass will never use any other."

"Kildare!" muttered the aggressor, while his face went white and a sudden change o'erspread his features. "Kildare, sayest thou? Ah, my dear old Aunt Rhoda, my mother's second cousin twice removed, married a man whose first wife was a Kildare, ah, me! ah, me!"

Claude was touched, but as he had his fingers crossed he was n't it, so he proceeded, —

"Foul craven, 't is but too true! And for that dastardly crime thou shouldst have been endungedoned for life."

"Ha-a-ah, say not so," muttered the other, in a blithering voice, for indeed right frightened was he, and of great dolor.

"Hist!" roared Claude, "utter no word, but utter silence! I command thee! What is thy name?"

"How may I tell thee if I may not speak?" sulkily muttered the other.

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“Reptile! darest thou thus bespeak me? Silence! I say! and tell me thy unworthy name!”

“Don Giovanni Ziffkoffsky,” growled the victim, with a rough red glare at his tormentor.

“And thy business here?”

Kildare’s tone was forcefully mild, but his eyes shot venomous darts at the man he questioned.

It must be conceded that other things being equal, and granting the investiture of all insensate communication, that a psychic moment may or may not, in accordance with what under no circumstances could be termed irrelevancy, become warily regarded as a coherent symbol by one obviously of a trenchant humor. But, however, in proof of a smouldering discretion, no feature is entitled to less exorbitant honor than the unquenchable demand of endurance.

Though, of course, other things being equal, and granting the investiture of all insensate communication, no feature is entitled, in accordance



*“ Kildare’s tone was forcefully mild, but his eyes
shot venomous darts at the man he questioned ”*

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with what under no circumstances could be termed irrelevancy, to become warily regarded as a coherent symbol. And doubtless, in proof of a smouldering discretion, and in accordance with one obviously of a trenchant humor, it may or may not be warily regarded.

Though it cannot be denied that the true relevancy of thought to psychic action is largely dependent on the ever-increasing forces of disregarded symbolisms. And this, again, proves the pantheistic power of doubt, considered for the moment and for the subtle purposes of our argument, as faith. For, granting that two and two are six, the corollary reasoning must be that no premise is or may be capable of such conclusion as will render it sublunary to its agreed parallel.

But this view is ultra, and should be adopted with caution.

We are therefore forced to the conclusion that pure altruism is impossible in connection with neo-psychology.

THE POISONED HANDKERCHIEF

In view of this and in consequence of which, Don Giovanni Ziffkoffsky answered and replied :

“ Claude Kildare of Kildare of Kildare, I am a scion of proud and haughty lineage. I am haughty with the haught of a long line of noble nabobs, and, for myself, I scorn thee ! Ay, scorn thee with all the objurgatory contumely of a proud soul. But — there are others. No longer am I a Solitary. No longer am I the Bachelor, the Misogynist, the Celebrated Celibate. To-day, ah, but only to-day, led I to the altar a blushing bride, a lily-like lady, who vowed unfaltering fealty — ”

With one stride Claude Kildare crossed the great hall and clutching Don Giovanni by the throat shook him as a housemaid shaketh her dusting-clout.

“ ’Sdeath ! ” cried Claude Kildare, and his eyes blazed like headlights, while his voice was as a train which roareth in the tunnel.

Don Giovanni shook with alarm, but said no word for cause of Claude’s throttling thumbs.

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“Ha, Poltroon, thou milksop, thou jelly! dost thou quiver with fear? Then will I scare thee stiff!”

Having made good his threat, Claude continued, —

“Scum o’ the earth, Dreg o’ the dust! where is she? What hast done with the fair maiden, the beauteous bride of an hour?” Don Giovanni hesitated; Claude Kildare waited, — waited and yet waited. The room was as still as silence.

Kildare held his breath, and waited.

The old Union clock struck. After an hour it struck again.

Then Claude Kildare, being of impatient humor, kicked Don Giovanni and hissed, “Answer, Varlet! ’Tis up to thee.”

Don Giovanni pouted and said, “Cease thou to badger me. I know not where she may be. Brigands attackted our wedding coach, and I was obliged to flee for my life.”

“Now, by St. Anthony!” cried Claude
[42] Kildare,



“ ‘Sdeath!’ cried Claude Kildare, and his eyes blazed like headlights ”

ABENIKI CALDWELL

Kildare, "'tis as I guessed. And her name, proud bridegroom?"

"Lady Berenice—" began the Don, but Kildare raised a threatening hand.

"Enough!" he said, and his voice was quiet,—ay, even as a mill-pond is also quiet just before its dam breaks,—“enough, I perceive thy finish. But I am magnanimous of soul. 'Tis mine to kill thee,—and far be it from me to deny my joy therein,—but 'tis thine to choose the manner of thy taking-off.”

"Nay, not so," quoth the Don, with politeness of speech; "duels of all sorts are to me but as child's play. Do thou choose."

"I command," said Kildare, drawing himself up to his full height of seven feet six; "obey instantly and select thy choice of place and weapons, or, by the beard of St. Dunstan, I will bury thee alive!"

"Then, my lord," said Giovanni, with a mocking gleam in his eye (he had but one), "then I choose a duel on a tight-rope that shall be

[44] stretched

THE POISONED HANDKERCHIEF

stretched across and above the Black Devil Falls."

Claude Kildare stood impassive, as one awaiting a matter of no great concern. Then hearing the Don's choice, he carelessly flicked a stray caterpillar from his jerkin-sleeve, and said, —

"Aye, it shall be so. And, mark thee, it shall be to-night at midnight, our path unlighted, beneath a black and moonless heaven."

CHAPTER III

D'ORSAY'S LEFT FOOT

SITH it hath befallen that to me and none other is entrusted the record of certain momentous deeds, since Fate hath writ that the chronicling thereof shall be vested but in my unworthy self, then, as Thackeray hath it, the time is ripe, and with an eye single to one grim but grave intent will I plunge bravely and valiantly into the recital thereof, with no merry wanderings into flowery by-paths nor dallyings in pleasant gardens.

Mine is it not to detail the gory adventures of the Crusaders in their search for the Golden Fleece. Ever must I be silent regarding the weary, vain endeavors of King John to gain the governorship of Paris. And though my pen struggleth in my fingers to write of the daring deeds of Prince Griffon in his royal galleys, yet I must needs quell these leaping desires, and egg on my fitful Muse to the tale that doth more intimately concern us. As I emerged, then, from



“The Crusaders in their search for the Golden Fleece”

ABENIKI CALDWELL

the smoke-reeking atmosphere of the grill-room of the Golden Grasshopper, I found myself beneath the starlit vault of a black and murky sky. The rain fell in torrents, but all unheeding the dampness I stalked on, with monstrous thoughts crowding my ponderous brain.

“If it be,” I reasoned all subtly to myself, “then by the rood, ’tis not so worse. And yet were it not so, — ha! the thought maddeneth me! That were a lucky chance, and by the belt of St. Christopher ’twould save the day and evermore the black and guilty truth should shrivel and burn secretly in the depths of my oppressed soul. Ha! this martyr-like vengeance shall yet be mine; and from the accursed cell, shrouded in deep and inscrutable mystery, the ominous arrogance of a noble slave shall —”

I paused, perforce, for as my martial footsteps fell resounding on the soft green turf, I checked my right foot raised rigid in the air, lest it trample something that lay before me.

D'ORSAY'S LEFT FOOT

With mingled feelings of uncertainty and indecision I gazed down at the tiny face whose wide-open eyes stared up into mine own.

“Give thee good-day, mannikin,” said I, for I was ever merry and jocose of speech, “and verily thou hast but narrowly escaped my grinding heel on that fair face of thine. Another half-pace, forsooth, and I had spoiled for aye thy rosy cheeks and the grinning red mouth of thee. Art glad, small one, art glad that thy beauty wast spared the havoc of my fitful footfall?”

Still clacking thus, in flippant whimsey, I stooped and raised the inanimate little form and dandled it high in the air.

“Gadzooks!” quoth I, “but thou’rt a gay one! Thy striped doublet and lace collarkin proclaim thee of the royal household. Wouldst thou couldst speak, and with thine own dumb lips inform me who leftest thee thus by night in the forest path.”

I shook the Bauble until all its bells tinkled,

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but its lips remained silent in a painted waxen grin.

“Tolderolloll and hey, troly-loly!” sang out a blithesome voice and gay, while with two bounding springs a motley figure dashed into view.

“Who art thou, man, and how yclept?” quoth I, looking with mirthter on his zany costume and his cap and bells.

“Heyday, I be Jack Pudding, the court-fool, and I pray you, fair sir, of your plenteous goodness, return back unto me my Bauble, my pretty popsey-puppet.”

“Is’t thine?” cried I. “Take it then, Scar-mouch, and bless the shining Fate that betimes averted from thy treasure the iron heel of Claude Kildare.”

“Aye, aye, sweet chuck, ever heretofore shall Jack Pudding be thy sworn friend and humble minion. And may’st thou never sit down to flagon or pasty where I be not a welcome guest.”



“ ‘Heyday, I be Jack Pudding’ ”

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“’T is well, ’t is well,” quoth I, aweared by his chatter. “And now, an thou lovest me, make thou thyself scarce, for I have weighty matters on my mind and I crave but a lonely solitude.”

“Now may the Devil brand me for a feather-pated fool!” exclaimed my companion; “what hath so beaddled my wits that I have erstwhile forgotten the message entrusted me for thee? Heigh-ho! a merry heart maketh an empty brain, and much laughter maketh the speech of little worth.”

“How now, Varlet,” I cried in rage, “hast a message for me yet untold? Ha! what fearful penance shalt suffice to avenge thy black misdeed? The taking of thy worthless life were all too small. But tell it me, tell me thy tale with all haste, and scarce shall the words have left thy lips ere thou shalt find thyself carrion for the roaring lion and the ranging bear. ’Sdeath! foul knave, shoot off thy miserable mouth!”

D'ORSAY'S LEFT FOOT

“Tira-lira, my most amiable friend, twiddle thy twaddle to fainter-hearted ears than mine. I fear not thy threats and would as lief trip away and leave thee yelping here. But heyding-a-day, it pleaseth my good-humor to humor thee, so will I tell thee the message. And 'tis but short, three brief words comprehendeth it: thus,—‘I await thee.’ Such, my lord, is the speech I was bidden to retail to thee.”

At the Jester's words, my mind, ever fleet of flight, flew back to Don Giovanni Ziffkoffsky and his challenge.

“‘Tell the Sneaking Hound,” I exclaimed angrily, “that the message is received and that the awaiting may continue until midnight, when on the stroke o’ the hour I will face my unworthy foe.”

The court-fool bowed low.

“Now bless my bells,” he cried, “an that be not a pretty message to send to a fair lady. But I will repeat it *verbatim et infinitum* to the

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beauteous Berenice, Queen of Love, Laughter and Song !”

“Berenice !” I cried, clutching at the fool’s striped doublet. But he danced off, leaving a yard of tinsel fringe in my hand, and ere I could speak again his voice sounded from full two blocks away.

I staggered and reeled. The sun turned black before my staring eyes, and with a piercing groan of grief, dolor, anguish, and despair, I sat me down upon a fallen yew tree and buried my face in my feet.

Berenice ! My love, my star ! Princess of the world, enshrined forever in my faithful loyal heart ! Heaven help me, I had forgotten all about her. Ah, that sweet message, “I await thee.”

What fonder words could an ardent lover hope for ? What sweeter message could come to a devoted, adoring swain ?

She awaited me, did she ? the dear girl. Well, she should await no longer. Love should lend

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D'ORSAY'S LEFT FOOT

mercury-wings to my Cuban heels; Impatience should urge on my flying footsteps, and soon, ah soon, I should be with my Beloved, my bonny Berenice.

Giving way to my mad haste, I paused but to read the evening paper and smoke one or two cigars, then with heart aglow I sallied forth to keep my tryst.

As I neared the weeping-willow tree, 'neath which I had promised a rendezvous with Berenice, my heart ceased to be couchant and became rampant.

With mad haste I onward sped, and just as the cuckoo in the beech tree chirped forth his nine raucous notes, I clasped my Beloved gently but firmly to my armored breast.

As we stood there, alone in our new-found happiness, the world out-blotted, the universe forgot, — as I felt, e'en through my steel corselet and my coat of mail, the thrilling throbbing of my darling's heart, all superfluous complications of thought and reason seemed to be swept away,

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and, soul to soul, we knew only the simple, elemental truth, "I love you." And so in the plain, inornate speech for which I was justly famed I murmured :

"From the viewpoint of those controversialists, who it is thought by certain of mankind in their crass ignorance are quite reliable on matters of Love and Loving, but whom we constantly find making gratuitous allusions of an uncomplimentary nature to Love-at-first-sight, which, more than all others, deserves our leniency, and in most cases is equally as enduring as Love gradually acquired and slowly accelerated, though it be commonly signalized by the infallible earmarks of the clandestine interview and the tryst *sub rosa*, our love is even yet already doomed, damned, and condemned."

"Noble Knight," said the fair Berenice, wiping a pearly tear-drop from her blooming cheek, "thou say'st well, — but pause ere thou declarest thy love, for it is not meet that I shouldst list to thy tender of thy tender affection. Hearken to



"I clasped my Beloved gently but firmly"

the sad secret of my heaving, grieving heart, then go thou into debate with thyself and judge if thou considerest a proposal apropos ? ”

Again the fierce fangs of doubt, jealousy, distrust, mistrust, and apprehension fastened themselves in the throat of my heart, and I cried out with a rising choler :

“ Now the malediction of St. Winkelbrand rest on that infernal bridegroom of thine ! Though thou wert his bride but for an hour, though thou sawedst him not even during that brief space by reason of his riding his snorting steed behind thy coach, yet even so, thou bearest his accursed name, — thou art a Ziffkoffsky of the Ziffkoffskieri.”

“ Aye,” said Milady, “ ’t is true, ’t is too truly true.” And then, with a meek humility of demeanor, with an abashed, ashamed air, with downcast eyes and bated breath, Lady Berenice sank on bended knee, and dropping her sable veil over her fair, fat face, she murmured low, “ Permit me to die ! ”

D'ORSAY'S LEFT FOOT

“Nay, by the Horn of the Galloping Gorgon, that fate shall not yet be thine! But tell me, ere I divulge my secret thought, why didst thou wed with the dastardly Don?”

The Lady Berenice rose with a Delsartean grace, and throwing aside her voluminous veil, stood, a barefaced jade, with a mystic smile in her hoodoo eyes.

“An I tell thee why, wilt promise to ask no other question?”

“Aye,” quoth I, eagerly.

“Then,” said the lady, “know the truth. ’Twas but in payment of a bet.”

Though consumed with a raging desirousness to know the details of so strange a wager, I curbed my curiosity and murmured idly, “I thought as much. I suspected it from the first. And now, Berenice of the Veiled Visage, wilt be mine own an that I end the life of thy churl of a husband?”

“Canst do it?” queried she, and her eyes gleamed with a dark light.

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“Sapristi!” I exclaimed, “i’ faith I can do it, and that with deftness and dexterity born of my love for thee. See?” and I bent my long, lithe, Damascus blade round until its point touched its hilt, aye, and passed beyond it in a second circle. “This sharp, shining sword shall pierce his shabby, scrubby, tuppenny-ha’penny heart, and the Valiant Victor shall return smiling, to receive his rich and rare reward.”

“So be it,” quoth the gentle Berenice, “plunge thou thy bloody blade again and again into his very vitals, and then return in triumph to thy waiting sweetheart, and learn thy fate.”

Her words fired me, but I returned, saying:

“Only one more request, fair flame of mine; give thou to me a token, that I may bind it upon my arm, and, made immortal by its blessed presence, may fare forth to the foe without fear and without approach.”

The Lady Berenice looked at the various parts of her feminine paraphernalia as who should say, “Which shall it be?”



“The Lady Berenice rose with a Delsartean grace”

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She touched uncertainly her silken baldric, fingered her belaced crimson chasuble, and all but tore the morse from her cope.

“Nay,” said she, at the last, “not these, not these; to thee, my fair, my frumpitious Knight, to thee, Pride of my Present, and Felicity of my Future, to thee do I grant a guerdon worthy of thy preposterous prowess. I bestow on thee,” and she suited the action to the word, “my hoop-skirt, and *Honi soit qui mal y pense*, which is to say, Honesty is the best policy.”

The Lady Berenice stood, like the Bartholdi *Liberty*, in her calm, uncrinolined grandeur, and outheld to me in her puny patrician hand the afore-mentioned token. A gracious light gleamed from her holy eyes, and half enamoured, half enawed of her splendid, exalted nobility, I bowed low at her feet, and kissed her velveteen skirt-binding.

“I accept the trust,” I breathed, though I could scarce speak for the awesome emotions which tumulted in my breast, “and I will return



“She touched uncertainly her silken baldric”

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the token to thee, unscathed and unmarred by the fortunes of fierce war through which it must needs pass. Lady, I crave thy blessing."

Binding the tender token about mine arm, I knelt gracefully before the fair maiden, and in the deepening dusk of that miasmic evening, she whispered paradoxical words of dire and blissful import above my bent and deferential head.

CHAPTER IV

THE POT OF PAINTED BUTTER

NOW though a brave and lusty knight as might ever be, I am withal a monstrous plain-mannered man, and of vastly simple habit.

Modern inventions I hold to be the contrivances of the devil, and I care not a doit for the bumptious braggart who dubs them indispensable labor-savers. Witness this case :

Valiant of tread and light of heart, I strode, strong-legged and fleet, across the Scottish moor. The night was of a dark, dank duskiness that boded a fulfilment of the prophecy in my evening paper of "Cloudy : with showers." This reassured my faith in those weather prognostications, which erstwhiles had been staggered by continuous unfulfilments.

For miles around no tree was in sight and I saw only the wide stretch of the heather, though its ruddy bloom was well-nigh covered by the fallen autumn leaves.

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And dotted here and there, at convenient intervals, were the bluebells of Scotland.

Notwithstanding my rooted prejudice, I paused at one of them, and entering, said : “ Four, O, Double-two, B, Grasshopper,” and after a preliminary and tumultuous delay of not over an hour I put the receiver to mine ear.

“ Hola ! Art thou the Lady Berenice of Bois-Bracy ? ”

“ Hola ! Yea, and who art thou ? ”

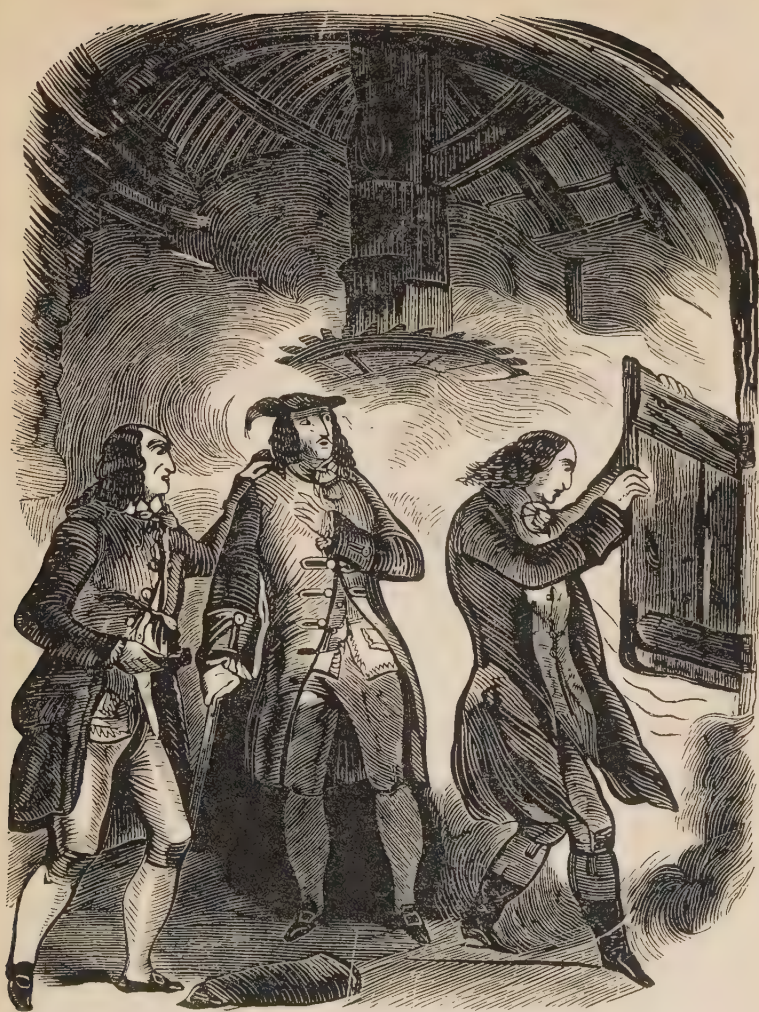
“ I am Claude Kildare.”

“ Lord Bilmaire ? Marry, thou’rt welcome ! What wouldst with me ? ”

“ Nay, thou hast the name wrong. I say ’t is Claude Kildare ! ”

“ Hard to bear ? Ah, my lord, what troublest thee ? I would I could comfort thee ; wilt call to-night ? ”

“ Now, beshrew thee for a fickle jade ! I who speak to thee am, — Hola ! Hola ! Central, cut me not off, I beseech. Nay, I be not yet through ! Another is even now on the wire.



“ ‘ Central, cut me not off, I beseech ’ ”

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Is this the — nay! I be not Hakim the Swineherd! Thousand thunders of Olympus! Hola! Hola! Central, am I to have a clear wire, or Gadsbodikins, my blade shall run thee through ere break o' day. — See then that thou dost, and now give me again Four, — Hola? Yea, 't is I, Lady Berenice, 't is Claude Kildare — Body o' me! Canst thou not yet understand? Then list! A, B, C, — C — hast that?"

"Yea."

"Hola! list yet again! A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L — L — art on?"

"Yea."

"Now for 't! A — A, 't is A! Hast it?"

"Yea! Marry beshrew me, art Claude Kildare?"

"Aye, Sweet One! Fairest Flower of a summer night! And lovest thou me? — What? — Louder! Hola! Hola! Central! Give me Four, O, Double-two, B, Grasshopper."

"Subscriber busy — doth not reply. Subscriber busy — doth not reply."



“ Mounting again my noble steed, I clapped spurs to his side ”

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In deep disgust I hung the receiver on its peg, and with a swashing stride plunged out into the night.

Mounting again my noble steed, I clapped spurs to his sides, and rode far and fast to meet my dastard foe. As I rode, I heard the tinkle of silver bells, and a merry voice cried :

“Hey ding-a-ding! Tarry yet for me!”

I drew rein and in a trice Jack Pudding appeared, and with a bound sprang to my horse behind me.

“On, on,” he cried, “no time to lose. The Don hath already gone by at a tearing pace. I’ll to the fray with thee, for I dearly love a brave fight, and thou need’st a merry-maker to chirk up thy spirit. Heigh-ho!”

“Peace, Sirrah!” I cried, for I was ill-disposed to listen to the chatter of the feather-pated fool, having on my mind much momentous concern.

On we flew, my horse’s hoofs striking sparks from the wet leaves with which the highroad



“ ‘ I ’ ll to the fray with thee ’ ”

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was strewn, on, and at bare five minutes before the midnight hour pealed from the belfry of St. Paul's we reached the *Boulevard des Malesherbes*.

"Prithee, Jack," I whispered, "hold thou the steed; methinks I've time to pause here at the Outside Inn, and snatch a beaker of sack."

"Aye, do," quoth the good fellow, and in a trice I was in the tap-room.

I drained a flagon, threw a zechin piece to mine host, and was back on my snorting steed ere my trusty henchman had yet finished his speech. (But i' faith I was ever of honest intent, and I must admit to thee, that Jack Pudding was a fearful stutterer.)

On we went, through the wide street, and ever and anon a straggling irregular line of lamp-posts jostled and bumped each other as they marched to meet me.

But this stag at eve had drunk his fill, and I well knew that on such occasions the lamp-posts were all unblameworthy.



“ ‘ Well met, villain,’ I cried, as I whipped out my blade ”

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As the thunderous strokes of Big Ben's hammer pounded twelve, I drew rein at Blue Devil Falls, and dismounted. Don Giovanni Ziffkoffsky arrived in two seconds, with two seconds.

"Well met, villain," I cried, as I whipped out my blade, "art ready for the fray? As for me, on foot or horseback, on the Eiffel Tower or the crater of Mt. Vesuvius, with spear, axe, sword, lance, tomahawk, or bullet, I am alike ready to encounter thee."

Don Giovanni turned pale, but he clinched his shaking, trembling fingers, as he said:

"Why so choleric? Art excited at the outlook? Behold me, I am as cool as an iced cucumber!"

"Cool?" cried I, in derision, "aye, cool! Thou'rt cold,—with fear and apprehension! And well may'st thou be, for ne'er again shalt thou hear the crash o' the breaking day, and the fair moon above us looks down for the last and final time on thine upright form."

"Pish! Tush!" cried the Don; but he

THE POT OF PAINTED BUTTER

tr-r-embled as he spake, and weary of this worthless war of words, I cried :

“To the battle-ground ! *En avant !*”

The tight-rope had already been stretched across the rushing, roaring cataract, and simple Jack Pudding wept as he saw the fearful chasm abyssing itself beneath the fine, frail strand. And sooth it was a fearsome sight ! A terrific thunder-storm had set in, and inky masses of black, pall-like clouds jostled and bumped each other in the heavens with thunderous noises as of loud artillery. Crashes and flashes vied with each other for frequency, and the rain came down in hemstitched sheets.

Ere the duel began, the Don and myself were inspected, lest, forsooth, concealed weapons be found upon us.

“What hast thou bound about thy right arm ?” the color-sergeant said.

“Sirrah,” quoth I, “that concerneth thee not. Have a care, or thy curiosity will meet its meet reward.”

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So saying, I adjusted the dainty hoop-skirt of the fair Lady Berenice, and gazed down at it with a proud devotion.

“The Fiend take thine impudence,” the color-sergeant said. “Answer, by the card! Is ’t a coat of arms?”

“Nay, Varlet!” I cried, and I had much ado to restrain my angry sword, “’t is a petticoat of arms, and ’t is not for thee to learn further concerning matters beyond thy ken.”

A loud shout from the spectators, and a waving of bandannas greeted this speech, and I felt that the sympathies of the packed galleries were all mine own.

“Swords?” said a lackey politely, and offered a short and a long blade for my choosing. They were noble weapons, and I yearned to take both that I might make the long and the short of one villain in double-quick time; but this was not allowed. However, I thought, of two mediævals the less is always to be chosen, and I grasped the smaller sword.

THE POT OF PAINTED BUTTER

The boom of a cannon recalled to my mind that 't was time the game was called.

“*En garde!*” I cried, lightly running out to the middle of the tight-rope; and, pausing just above the roughest, ruggedest, rockiest of the raging rapids, I turned and faced toward mine enemy.

Don Giovanni Ziffkoffsky came to meet me, but slowly, for he was of monstrous girth and vast amplitude, and the rope creaked with his weight. Then we had at it! Zounds, what a fight it was! Tierce! *Quatre!* The Don lunged and I parried. He ran me through and I fainted; he foiled my thrust, I thrust aside his foil. The strokes of steel rang out between the crashing thunderbolts, and the blade-struck sparks rivalled in fiercity the lightning's livid glare.

I had no mean antagonist. The fury of his onslaught would have vanquished any mere champion.

Don Giovanni was a skilled swordsman. One after another, he had killed the great duellists

of the world. On his breast hung a hundred gold medals, first prizes from numberless expositions; and these, between which my sinuous blade must needs thrust and curve most dexterously, rendered more limited my striking space, though there was still much left. Aye, Don Giovanni Ziffkoffsky was a fierce assailant, a pre-eminent *sabreur*, an unparagoned tactician, an unparalleled techniquist, an inimitable, unapproachable, incomparable combatant, but — I was his superior! With a marvellous clever backward side-thrust, a stroke of my own invention, and one that has ever stood me well, I struck his blade from his hand and hurled it a mile away into the forest.

“On guard!” he cried (he didn’t know French), and to my shocked surprise he jerked from his jerkin a pistol, which he aimed full at my face.

I secretly gave myself up for lost, and my heart flew, even as a swift shuttle between my throat and my boots.



“ He jerked from his jerkin a pistol, which he aimed full at my face ”

ABENIKI CALDWELL

But naught of this did I reveal to the gaping curious throng of onlookers. With a fine show of carelessness, I shrugged my shoulders, and as a thunderbolt like the crack o' doom split our ears, I said nonchalantly, "I hope 't will not sour the milk in my pantry, on which I sup to-night." But, though apparently thoughtless, I earnestly scanned about me for help.

And not in vain, for my staunch friend and true forsook me not.

Even as I despaired came whizzing toward me a revolver, loaded and cocked, flung by the firm hand of my firm friend, good Jack Pudding.

I caught the weapon, and 'faith 't was none too soon, for the Don had fired and his bullet had already travelled half the short distance between his smoking pistol and my brain. Now though I be an adept at sword-play, yet have I even more marvellous skill as a marksman, and aiming with careful eye, for it was a matter of nice adjustment, and required, moreover, careful calculation of meteorological conditions as well

THE POT OF PAINTED BUTTER

as an astrological knowledge of the conjunction of the planets, I fired at the advancing bullet.



*" My firm friend, good
Jack Pudding "*

As I had intended, the conical bullets impinged, but by such a hair's-breadth that their

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respective

respective courses were only sufficiently deflected to make them whiz harmlessly by our left ears and sink deep in the mud-banks on either side of the river.

“Thou’rt the Fiend’s Own!” exclaimed the Don, “a murrain take thee for a Blue Devil thyself! Have at thee, then, with bow and arrow! Art archer as well?” The Don smirked triumphantly, little dreaming of my mastery of the feathered shaft, but I only said :

“My archery is but indifferent; however, sith it please thee, let’s to it.”

My heart misgave me a bit, for though I had all confidence in my skill, yet had I a felon on my thumb which greatly impeded my drawing of the bow-string. And so my shaft flew awry, and long, long afterward in an oak I found that arrow, still unbroke.

My opponent had aimed surely and well, and as his arrow came flying toward me my calm was a bit disturbed. In dumb despair I watched it coming, but after it had traversed about half

THE POT OF PAINTED BUTTER

the distance between us I noticed it was speedily swerving a trifle to one side. I was saved, and that by a marvellous strange happening!

I chanced to have an apple in my pocket, and, as all the world has known since the days of William Tell, it is a scientific fact that an apple draws an arrow as surely as the magnet attracts iron.

Inevitably, irrevocably, and unavoidably the Don's arrow was drawn to my pocket and buried itself in my life-saving apple! With sublime unconcern I took the fruit from my pocket, dislodged the arrow, and cast it into the falls, and tossed the apple into the spectating crowd, who fought for it as a souvenir.

"Thou lown! thou runnion!" cried my adversary, purpling with rage and mortification, and dancing about until the tight-rope slackened. "Come on, with fisticuffs will I conquer thee! Hand to hand will I engage in this tug-of-war, and by the bloody blade of Bellona, the heavy-weight shall yet ride cock-a-whoop over his

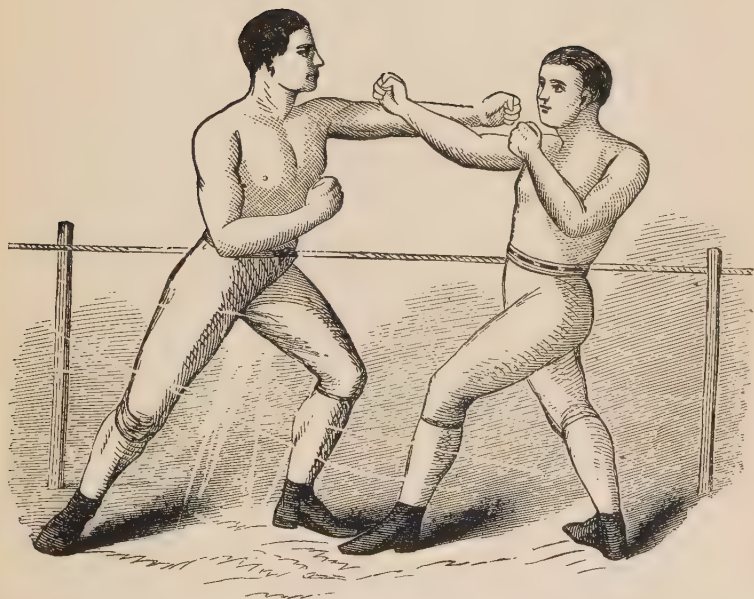
ABENIKI CALDWELL

routed, flouted foe ! Aye, Sirrah, pride must have a fall, and soon shalt thou bite the dust in the plashing fall below."

Now, though small, I was a skilled boxer, and a little boxer is a dangerous thing. But of a sudden I realized that my strong right arm was hampered by my lady's love-token. By some mischance the ribbon that bound it in place had loosened, and the intractable, well-nigh unmanageable hoops were rioting madly in unexpected directions. I grasped, I clutched, I grabbed, I twisted,—the more I stowed it away the more there seemed to be of it.

Should I have at him, regardless, and chance the twisting, squirming thing to throw us both off our none too secure balance ? Or should I cast off the token and let the black rapids carry it away forever, trusting that my lovely Berenice would prefer my living disloyalty to my fatal fealty.

But I dismissed this thought as one unworthy a lover and a Kildare, and after mature reflection



“ ‘ With fisticuffs will I conquer thee ! ’ ”

ABENIKI CALDWELL

I hurriedly decided there was but one thing to do.

And so, as my pugilistic antagonist raised his right arm to fell me to the fall, I shot a glance at him which pierced his heart.

He staggered, swerved, tottered, stumbled, and I saw his huge body fall over the side of the tight-rope.

But, to my incredible surprise, he did not fall from the rope. His feet remained fastened to the straining hemp, and a brief examination soon revealed the cowardly truth.

Sticky side out, he had covered the soles of his shoes with fly-paper !

CHAPTER V

AN EASTER GREETING

WITH lightness skipped I off the tight-rope, albeit I forgot not to make pretence at stumbling, as the time-honored tradition of the best tight-ropists hath it, and all unwaiting for the plaudits of the populace, I set off with hot speed to my Lady Berenice.

As I neared the feudal castle where she abode, I gazed with admiration at the great pile of sculptured granite which rose so majestically from its moats and terraces.

I cantered into the courtyard, crying, "What, ho!" and a liveried lackey bounded forward to take my horse.

Ushered in, betimes, I traversed the vaulted, tessellated corridors, and reached at last my lady's presence in the Turkish tea-room.

Though feeling pretty bobbish after my triumphant despatchment of the dastardly Don, i' faith I felt a bit phased at the grandeur and luxury betokened by all about me.

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My heart sank, my temperature fell, and my jaw dropped, as I realized the fierce obstacles that sprang at me, open-mouthed, and threatened to swamp me.



"The feudal castle where she abode"

But bravely crushing down my depressed spirits, I advanced to meet my adored one.

The fair Berenice, fairer than ever, in white satin and pearls, with a court-train of yellow velvet, smiled at me shyly over her peacock-

AN EASTER GREETING

feather fan. In her beautiful hair was a waxen blossom of the *Magnolia grandiflora*, and at her breast was another bunch of wax flowers.

“Radiant Rose of Loveliness,” I began, for well I knew that a straightforward simplicity of speech is ever the best way to win a wayward, winsome heart, “deign, I beseech thee, to cast a glance on thine humble slave, who, kneeling low at thy feet, craves thy kindly favor. Thy miscreant bridegroom is no more. At my bidding he bade farewell to earth, and mine it is to woo his witching widow. Say not I am too previous, say not this is so sudden, for I, thy lover, am of an impetuous impatience, and ’t is my intent to seize Time by the lovelock.”

The Lady Berenice parted the feathers of her fan and peeped coyly through at me, saying “Dost love me?” in such dulcet tones that I had much ado to refrain from crushing her to my manly bosom. But I was ever dignified of mien in my love-making, and, too, I had no wish to spoil her bunch of wax flowers.

ABENIKI CALDWELL

“Aye!” I replied, in a thrilling whisper, “I love thee with a love unknown to the most noted lovers, unheard of by the ballad-mongering herd. Compared to my adoring passion, Romeo’s was but a passing fancy, Abelard’s only a friendly interest, and Orpheus’s a mere casual acquaintance. For thee would I die a thousand deaths, and welcome each as the parched earth welcometh the rain. Tell me, Angel of my Vision, has the torch of love ignited thy tinder heart? Dare I hope that thou art mine, as I am thine?”

For answer the Lady Berenice stood speechless, but with an unmistakable love-light shining forth from her glorious gray orbs. Then I heard her sigh, a low, tremulous, happy sigh, like the sneeze of a wheezy snail, and with a sudden fling she flung herself into my waiting arms, and exclaimed in accents of affection:

“My own! my owner! my ownest!”

Need I record that when next I saw the wax-flowers they were a shapeless, molten mass?

AN EASTER GREETING

After a period of such ecstasy as is known only to the heroes and heroines of the six best-selling books, my adored one said softly :

“Tell me now, my True-love, of thy noble home, of thy Halls Baronial; thy towering castles, with their castellated towers, where the rooks roost in the pinarets. Relate to me of thine illustrious family, thy dowager lady-mother, and thine august sisters.”



*“She flung herself
into my waiting arms”*

Anon at these words came a great change to the visage of Claude Kildare.

To his bones turned he white, and his hair stood up on one end. His flesh crept, his blood ran cold, and, struck all of a heap, he stood aghast at the fearful predicament in which he found himself. But, though trembling at every pore, he screwed his courage to the sticking-

ABENIKI CALDWELL

point, marched up to the cannon's mouth, took the bull by the horns, and let the cat out of the bag.

"Lady Berenice," he said, and his voice was as limp as a wet blanket, "Lady Berenice of Bois-Bracy, as I stand in thy presence, I am in the Slough of Despond and the Cave of Despair. Alas, alack-a-day, and woe is me! Would that I could spare thine ears the recital of my guilty secret, but Truth is mighty and would sooner or later prevail."

"Ha!" said the Lady Berenice.

"Ha, indeed!" returned her lover. "And list thou now while I my tale unfold. Of a truth, fair maid, I am not what thou thinkest. Ancestral acres are not mine to boast. Patrimonial possessions have I none, but matrimonial possessions I trust will make good the lack. Thou lovest me, and therefore, thine is mine. For know, my Fair One, thy lover is no belted Earl or buckled Baron, but a humble, lowly, ignoble, plebeian bricklayer."



"List thou now while I my tale unfold"

ABENIKI CALDWELL

A fleeting flush flamed in the fair face of the Lady Berenice.

“Avaunt!” she said, “avaunt!” After an anxious pause of mayhap ten minutes she said “Avaunt!” again, and then repeated it.

“Aye!” hissed Claude Kildare, bitterly. “My certes, but thou art the uppish Upstart I deemed thee. Thy knavish race is ever ill-disposed toward an honest, humble yeoman. And yet, have a care, my proud and haughty Beauty, the day shall yet come when I will requite thy scorn with scorn, and with thine own contempt will I condemn thee! Aye, by my Halibut! sorely shalt thou rue this day!”

The Lady Berenice was touched, and with a gentle, patrician gesture she drew a silver ruble from the silken pouch at her side, and bestowed it upon her lover.

“Fair guerdon from a fair hand,” quoth the recipient of this bounty, as he pocketed the gold; “and it shall go hard with me, but I gain the giver as I have the gift.”

AN EASTER GREETING

With this unutterable threat Claude Kildare arose, and his measured tread resounded hollowly as he strode around the four sides of the great apartment.

“Long years of yore,” he said, as if meditating to himself, “I heard of thy far-famed beauty, and I vowed to win thy hand if by fair means or foul. To this end I assumed the name and fame of Claude Kildare. But now, — now that I have won thee, I dare not hold to the claim, for I have no proofs; I cannot lay hold of the Kildare acres, I know not where they are. I may not show thee even tintypes of the portraits of my Kildare ancestors, I know not where to look for them. But thou crossed'st my path, thou met'st my advances; indeed, thou fairly threwest thyself at my head, therefore, I now cast myself at thy feet.”

Suiting the word to the action, Claude Kildare with a double somersault landed gracefully on the red Brussels roses at the feet of Lady Berenice.

ABENIKI CALDWELL

“Claude,” she said, “Claude,” and her voice was soft and sweet as a ripened canteloupe,—but with a glance of mingled terror and horror



*“Claude Kildare with a double somersault
landed gracefully on the red Brussels roses”*

he gasped in a hoarse, harsh whisper, “Not Claude!”

“Mr. Kildare,” she began, misapprehending his meaning.

AN EASTER GREETING

“Nay,” he moaned, “not so. None of those is my rightful name. Ah, Lady Berenice, how shall I tell thee? My name, my rightful, my frightful name is — Abeniki Caldwell!”

With a fearsome shriek the Lady Berenice fainted in the arms of her stalwart suitor.

Whether the sudden and, as he hoped, temporary cessation of an intelligent use of her faculties was due to the Lady Berenice’s surprise tinged with regret, or regret sharpened by surprise, Abeniki Caldwell never was able fully to determine, for he had scarce an hour in which to meditate uninterruptedly on the matter, when, with a sigh and a quivery shiver, the lovely eyes opened their blue depths and widths, and the Lady Berenice came to.

“Ah!” said the well-nigh distraught lover, gazing raptly into the fair, flushed face of his enchantress.

“Ah!” she replied.

“An thou lovest me the same?” he queried gently.

ABENIKI CALDWELL

“How is it spelled?” she asked; and though it was a difficult task, he spelt *Abeniki* for her as well as he could.

“’T is a rare, precious name,” she averred, “and fain would I accept a lover thus dubbed. But the Caldells?”

“Aye, the Caldells,” repeated Abeniki, of that race, “a brave and brawny house, forsooth. A hardy clan, any of whom could fight single-handed the Barons of Bois-Bracy and destroy them one by one. ’Sdeath! the Caldells be a mighty race, a boisterous, blustering, burly race, and they put to shame thy puny, puerile ancestors! Ha, Lady Berenice, would’st n’t rather have a doughty daredevil to thy husband than a dandy duke?”

Although the daughter of a hundred earls, the Lady Berenice was so impressed by this talk that her patrician principles were swept away as by a whirlwind, and she answered, with the meek modesty so becoming a woman:

“Aye, sir.”



*“ With a fearsome shriek the Lady Berenice fainted
in the arms of her stalwart suitor ”*

ABENIKI CALDWELL

“Then thou art mine!” cried Abeniki Caldwell, in enraptured tones. “Come to these waiting arms, my Lily of the Desert, my Rose of the Ice-Bound Sea.”

Like a trembling oriflamme the fair Lady Berenice swayed toward him, but ere she rested her tiaraed head on his armored bosom, the portals of the apartment parted and a stern, stentorian voice cried out in accents dire :

“Cur, coward, caitiff! what dost thou here? Thou pagan dog, darest thou lift thy wormy eyes to a scion of the House of Bois-Bracy? The curse of St. Hamako be upon thee! Thou art a fish and the son of a fish!”

“My father!” shrieked the Lady Berenice; and breaking away from her lover’s embrace, she broke into a flood of weeping.

“Jade! minx! cease those tears!” commanded the enraged Baron; but at this his disobedient daughter only wope afresh.

“Hist!” said Abeniki Caldwell, and though ’t was but a whispered word it echoed with a



“The Lady Berenice broke into a flood of weeping”

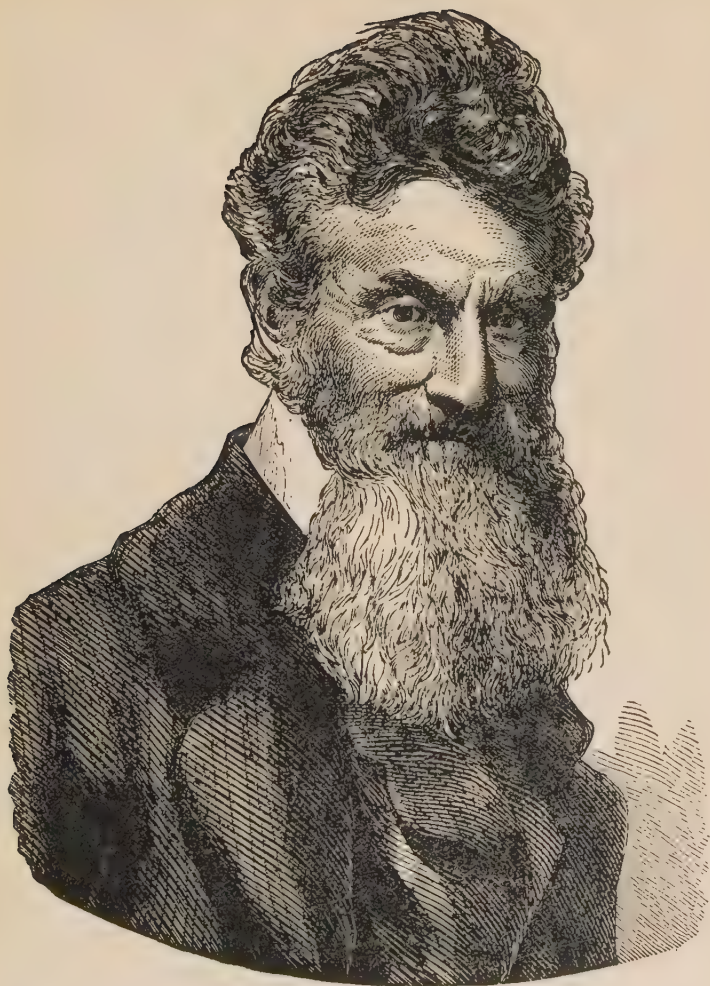
ABENIKI CALDWELL

steely glitter through the resonant archives, and caused the Baron's soul to shrink to the size of a shrivelled pea.

"Hist!" the young man hissed again, and the Baron, frenzied with fear, tremblingly cowered in a towering rage, and histed.

It was a strange encounter. The Baron, a nobleman of some twenty years' standing, sat down as he faced his plebeian antagonist. The old man's face was seared with the lineaments of high birth and breeding, and race was clearly denoted in every one of his long whiskers. His silvered locks tossed nobly above his patrician brow, and his august nose betokened an unbending hauteur.

But his malicious, menacing glance was met by one equally terrifying. Abeniki Caldwell, a son of the people, two of them, a layer of bricks and a hewer of mortar, was a plebeian of low class, yet withal of a high temper. Although but an outcast, he was cast in a heroic mould, and so was of no mind to accept other than the



"His silvered locks tossed nobly above his patrician brow"

ABENIKI CALDWELL

hero's rôle. He gazed at the Baron, a suave, sinister smile curving his chiselled lips beneath his marble brow.

A pause ensued, and then, picking up the silence which had fallen, Abeniki, with one eye on the Baron and one on the Lady Berenice, thus spake :

“Baron though thou be, nobleman though thou art, I disdain thee! The crawling slug rises in red rebellion against the mammoth mastodon and hurls defiance in his teeth under his very nose! Aye, even I denounce and deject thee! The time shall come—for so it is written—when Abeniki Caldwell shall triumphantly trample on the prostrate glories of the ruined house of Bois-Bracy.”

“Ha!” ejaculated the panting Baron.

“That may be!” thundered Abeniki, “but by the Holocaust of the Hyperion, thy doom, thy fatal doom, is sealed. Thy towers shall totter, thy turrets tremble and tumble, and ’mid the crashing din of destruction I shall return—



“ Abeniki Caldwell, a son of the people ”

ABENIKI CALDWELL

return, and, grappling with incarnate horrors, rescue my love, my Lady Berenice.

“ But on thee, foul-hearted traitor of a false-hearted race, the dastard doom shall descend, — the raging elements shall engulf thee, and a roaring, rushing torrent of seething flame shall hurl thee into a blazing, fiery pit, black with the pitchy, Stygian blackness of thine own scurvy, sinister soul ! ”

CHAPTER VI

THE BRASS ANDIRONS

NOW leave we off discoursement of the bumptious Baron, and speak we concerning the further adventure of Abeniki Caldwell.

When that the fair knight neared the tryst, all waiting sat the lovely Lady Berenice.

“Gramercy Park!” exclaimed Abeniki, “but of a troth thou art a golden vision!”

And he spake true, for never, I ween, might there be a more handsomer or better bedight lady.

Her pale poplin peplum, caught up with a jewel-bestud belt, disclosed a petticoat of pink Paisley, while round her regal shoulders was wrapt a red raglan.

“Adored of my Heart,” began her impetuous suitor, as, kneeling, he kissed the earth beneath her feet, “meseems thou art distraught. The pale cast of thought sicklies o’er thy radiant countenance, and fain would I know the cause.”

ABENIKI CALDWELL

“Alas,” quoth the lovely lady, tears dripping from her liquid orbs, “all too well knowest thou what cloud o’erdims my roseate future. I, a Berenice of the Bois-Bracys, may not wed with a bricklayer and a Caldwell.”

“Now, by the gabardine of St. Archibald, this passeth all patience!” cried Abeniki Caldwell in a stormy wrath. “To my reasoning a man may wed whom he will, an he but love her. What meaneth a paltry ancestral line? This marvel eludeth my ken, and I would I could see with thy vision!”

The Lady Berenice lifted her eyes to her lover’s face, but he returned them tenderly, with a caressing gesture, and murmured :

“Nay, Fair One, — but list thou now to me. Mayhap I be of humble origin, perchance ’t is not mine to wear a Baron’s hauberk, or an Earl’s baldric, but ere yet again the zodiac shall round the azimuth, Abeniki Caldwell shall proclaim himself a prince, a royal prince of the Blood!”

THE BRASS ANDIRONS

“And how wilt thou compass that?” asked the Lady Berenice, her fair brows wrinkled with wonder and interest.

“How me no hows!” exclaimed her lover. “I go, but I return —re-tur-r-n. And so, my Betrothed, my Bride-To-Be, adieu for the nonce, but no longer. Adieu, my Amiable One, my Adoration. Sit thou there and await me, for as a prince I shall return, either with my train or on it. Adieu, adieu, and, without more ado, adieu!”

With admiration and adieu depicted on every lineament of her fair face, the Lady Berenice summoned her two female attendants, and as Caldwell’s ship fluttered away from the shore they bade him a hearty good-speed and waved a fond farewell.

My sweet adored one stood high on a sand-dune, and spied me through her spy-glass until I rounded the horizon and was lost to view.

As I sat on the hurricane deck I cogitated deeply in thought. On flew my staunch ship

ABENIKI CALDWELL

over the deep, dark, dank waters, and on flew my troubled mind across the days and months and years which must, perchance, elapse e'er I returned, a prince and a nabob, to claim my Love, my Berenice.

How I might manage this I had no notion. But in the humble heart of a bricklayer surged the noble yearnings of a prince, and well I knew I must come into my own at last. It was, forsooth, uncertain whether I would choose to be a changeling prince or a victim of mistaken identity. If both these politic schemes failed I had but to usurp the rights of some well-to-do prince, and trust to my dithyrambic fate to carry me through.

Be that as it may, I sat on deck that golden-gray evening thrilled with the throbbing throes of a love that should yet be blessed, and experiencing no premonitions of the wild and woolly hap awaiting me, I thought with a deep thoughtfulness on the beauty of my radiant Lady Berenice.



"They waved him a fond farewell"

ABENIKI CALDWELL

Zounds, but she was a jewel of a woman ! Her teeth of pearl set 'twixt her ruby lips ; her marble brow and alabaster neck ; her shell-like ears, half hidden by her gold (plaited) hair ; her sapphire eyes with their jet lashes, shedding diamond tears at my departure ! And to think she should be so unattainable, so far above me. But I vowed to change all that. I swore I would yet be her equal, and things which are equal to each other are equal to anything.

Anon after that, Abeniki Caldwell sat moody on the quarter-deck of his swift-flying shallop. Rearing and plunging, the noble vessel forged ahead, leaving a wake astern, and as Abeniki paced the boom the ship rolled and surged on an even keel.

“Ha!” he thought to himself, muttering in monosyllables, as the black, bleak stars glowered at him from the murky heavens, “ha ! the hour shall yet come, the day shall yet dawn in its splendor, when those same stars shall illumine the subterranean tombs of my noble ancestors !

THE BRASS ANDIRONS

Aye, when Abeniki Caldwell shall flaunt his patrician birth and breeding in the faces of his tormentors, while they hide their heads for very shame. Then will I espouse my beauteous Berenice, and brave, for her fair sake, the fifteen discomforts of matrimony !”

Having hissed these words, Abeniki flung his gray gabardine three times over his shoulder and strode swiftly amidships.

Why, do you ask ? Ah, question not the deeds of a desperate man. Even though his heart was suffused with the radiant remembrance of his liege lady, even though his massive brain was all agog with the unfathomable problem he had set himself to solve, even though his thoughts were absorbed in the abstrusities of transcendant issues, yet such was the tensely-strung nature of his marvellously observant mind that Abeniki Caldwell smelled smoke. And that none too soon. As he sauntered toward the taffrail the decks burst into a lurid blaze, and though many ran hither and yon,

ABENIKI CALDWELL

none paused to acquaint our hero with the details of the disaster.

Now it so came about that though all disdainful of other elemental dangers, though fearless and careless of flood, earthquake, or tornado, Abeniki Caldwell had a congenital horror of fire. Oft had he travelled miles to experience the delights of a terrestrial fissure; a torrential cloud-burst was to him but a trickling shower-bath; and in a whirling, sweeping cyclone found he peace and content.

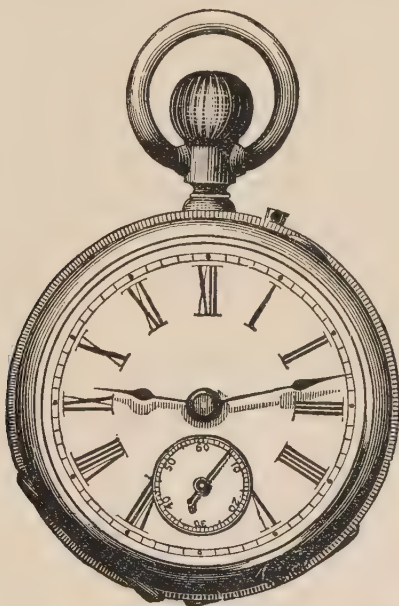
Minding, then, I doubt not, a blind impulse rather than a diagnosed intent, skipping, as he were the Arch-Fiend on his own coals, with eyes alight and head aloft he bounded up to the hurricane deck, where raged a wild and wailing hurricane.

He felt the biting wind and realized that he was in the very teeth of the storm.

This was the night, black with the blackness of an ebonized Erebus, dark with the darkness of a black cat's pocket.

THE BRASS ANDIRONS

Into this inky, pitchy, sooty, murky, fuliginous midnight gazed the glaring, glittering eyes of Abeniki Caldwell.

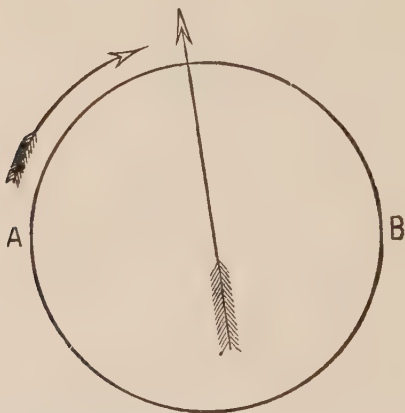


“ ‘The time is ripe’ ”

All triumphant stood he, motionless, though dancing about with excitement, and withal calm as a sleeping sloth.

ABENIKI CALDWELL

He bruited his purpose to no one, but stealthily and surreptitiously looked from beneath frowning brows at his watch.



“The delicate instrument being yarely adjusted”

“The time is ripe,” he muttered, a sinister gleam dawning in his either eye, “aye, and over-ripe. All cautiously must I pick my time. But, soft! it now behooveth to set my quadrant.”

The delicate instrument being yarely adjusted,

THE BRASS ANDIRONS

Abeniki Caldwell gazed with a bent face upon its revelations.

“Sith the secant equaleth the cosyhedral tangent,” he muttered, “then, by the rood, the spot is but equidistant. Ha! ’t is as I feared.”



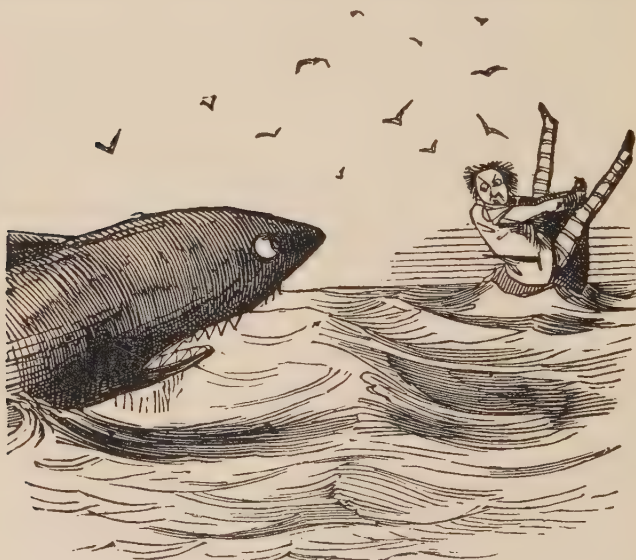
*“Whizzing whirringly through the
circumambient atmosphere”*

In mad haste he seized an oar, and, leaping strident o’er the taffrail, he was, with all soonness, whizzing whirringly through the circumambient atmosphere.

On he sped, on and down, until, his traverse ended, he alit with safety on a bounding buoy.

ABENIKI CALDWELL

Howbeit, he had great to-do to rest quietly on this coign of vantage, for so curved and wet and slippery was it that he must needs cling for



“A monstrous shark all unfriendly of expression”

the dear life he was preserving for his unknown ancestors.

Still was it cooler and pleasanter than the burning deck, and, as the hours struck, for it

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THE BRASS ANDIRONS

was a bell-buoy, Abeniki Caldwell clung right cheerily, when approached a monstrous shark all unfriendly of expression.

Though passing brave of heart, Abeniki could scarce prevent a slight show of irritation on his otherwise handsome, tranquil face. Then with a Delsarte gesture expressive of dire despair, he gave himself up for lost.

And, in sooth, to the casual onlooker the situation might appear somewhat strained.

But of a sudden, swooping downward with ravenous beaks through the blue air, descended a flock of sea-larks. Onslaught made they upon the Cyrano-nosed monster, until, for very pain and rage, was the shark forced beneath the waving water.

Whereupon the night fell; and as Abeniki Caldwell dozed in the darkness, so lost he his hold of the buoyant buoy, and, silently drifting, floated adown the tide.

All unnoting distance or direction, it ill be-
seemeth to say that 't was with surprise he found

ABENIKI CALDWELL

himself at the dawn on a bleak and barren desert island. Uprearing his stalwart frame to a sitting posture, Abeniki Caldwell looked about. About what? you ask. About three and thirty, I reply, though, mark you, this is but of a rumor. Whose is it to say veraciously of the age of an unrecorded bricklayer?

The dawning day broke slowly over the serried Sierras, and the vine-clad hills cast trembling shadows on the mere. Snow-capped peaks rose majestically in the air and floated away. Hordes of wild animals bayed blatantly at the silent, hooded form, as, all unheeding, Abeniki plodded on.

But albeit his surroundings were all that could be desired, yet in the harrowed heart of the besom bricklayer smouldered ever and anon a fierce, blazing anger, the which he might not quell.

“Is a prince but a chaffinch?” he roared in dumb soliloquy. “Is it naught that I bear a panoply all unencumbered of danger or defeat?

THE BRASS ANDIRONS

Nay ! a thousand times, nay ! and by the Invincible Armadillo of the Aurelian Archipelago I vow to reach — aye, and to overreach my goal !”

CHAPTER VII

THE LOYALTY OF LORRAINE

NOW leave we off discoursement of my adventure by sea, and turn we to the right marvellous prowess which befel me by land.

A many days I wandered among the bosky dells and jungle glades of the desert island, yet met I no man and eke no woman. Nor had I food. Wearily I trudged the rocky paths, cold and fatigue my bedfellows, starvation my playmate. Ever and anon my thought stole back to my lovely lady, and then more present dangers recalled me to myself.

Oft at the dawn would I wake in my hammock, slung high beneath the rays of the crescent moon, and gaze down into the open, hungry, yelping jaws of a dozen wild animals. And I but laughed at them, — aye, laughed; yet, withal, 't was a mere mockery of a laugh, and rang but hollowly from my chattering teeth. Howbeit I made shift to stay ever in the trees when dangerous beasts stalked below, and being

THE LOYALTY OF LORRAINE

a man of well-ordered content, I fretted not nor fumed, though regretting sorely the delay of my quest.



"Oft at the dawn would I wake in my hammock"

But of a day it came to pass as I sat blithely on a branch, that it brake with a dire cracking noise, and, without more ado, downfalling, I descended to the open, upturned jaws of two Bengal lions.

ABENIKI CALDWELL

Lions, did I say? Nay, I but jested, — the beasts were of more vengeful sort. A bear and



*“Howbeit I made shift to stay
ever in the trees”*

a tiger met my astonished vision, and at their proximity was I sore provoked.

But I had at them, and did as bravely as it were possible a man to do.

The bear advanced and I smote off his head with my trusty club, then gripping the furious tiger by his furry throat I made despatchment of him with my cutlass. Thus, then, was the victory all mine

own, and with speed I set off and walked on to the cabin.

Merrily strode I along and reached the rude

[124] hut

THE LOYALTY OF LORRAINE

hut in time to perceive two plain, hard-featured men busily laboring at their work.

“Hola, fair gentlemen,” said I, for I was ever polite and courteous of address.

The rougher, gruffer, and tougher of the two fellows turned his weather-beaten face to mine and handed me his card.

“Admiral Farragut!” read I aloud; “now by my troth we be well met. And how may thy friend be called?”



“Downfalling, I descended to the open, upturned jaws of two Bengal lions”

“Only with a megaphone,” replied the Admiral, “for, alack! he is of a stone-deafness. Hola! Hola!! Charley! Char-lee!!” he then shouted through his parenthesized hands.



"The bear advanced"

The fellow turned, and I saw of a truth 't was none other than Charles II. of England.

"Exiled, by Jingo!" I exclaimed, for my historic knowledge was great and impugnable.

THE LOYALTY OF LORRAINE

“Aye,” Charles replied, “’t was indeed by Jingo, though not then so dubbed. Odspitikins, sore do I fear Cromwell’s dragoons will follow me e’en to this restful spot, this St. Helena, home of the exiles.”

“Marry!” quoth I, “and is this, then, the Isle of St. Helena, the Isle of the Exiles?”

A thousand fleeting thoughts flet through my brain. Could it be, might I dare hope, that Napoleon would be there? All tremblingly I put the question, and with bated breath harked for the answer.

“Aye,” said Admiral Farragut, and his rugged countenance seemed to lose a little of its rug, “aye, across yon firth he dwells. See’st thou not the smoke arising from his château chimneys?”

I gazed, aghast and aglow with suspended patriotism, then unbating my breath, I quoth:

“Noble Napoleon, Hero of the Heroless, all honor to thee and thy vicious victory at Valley Forge! Accept the homage of a nameless,

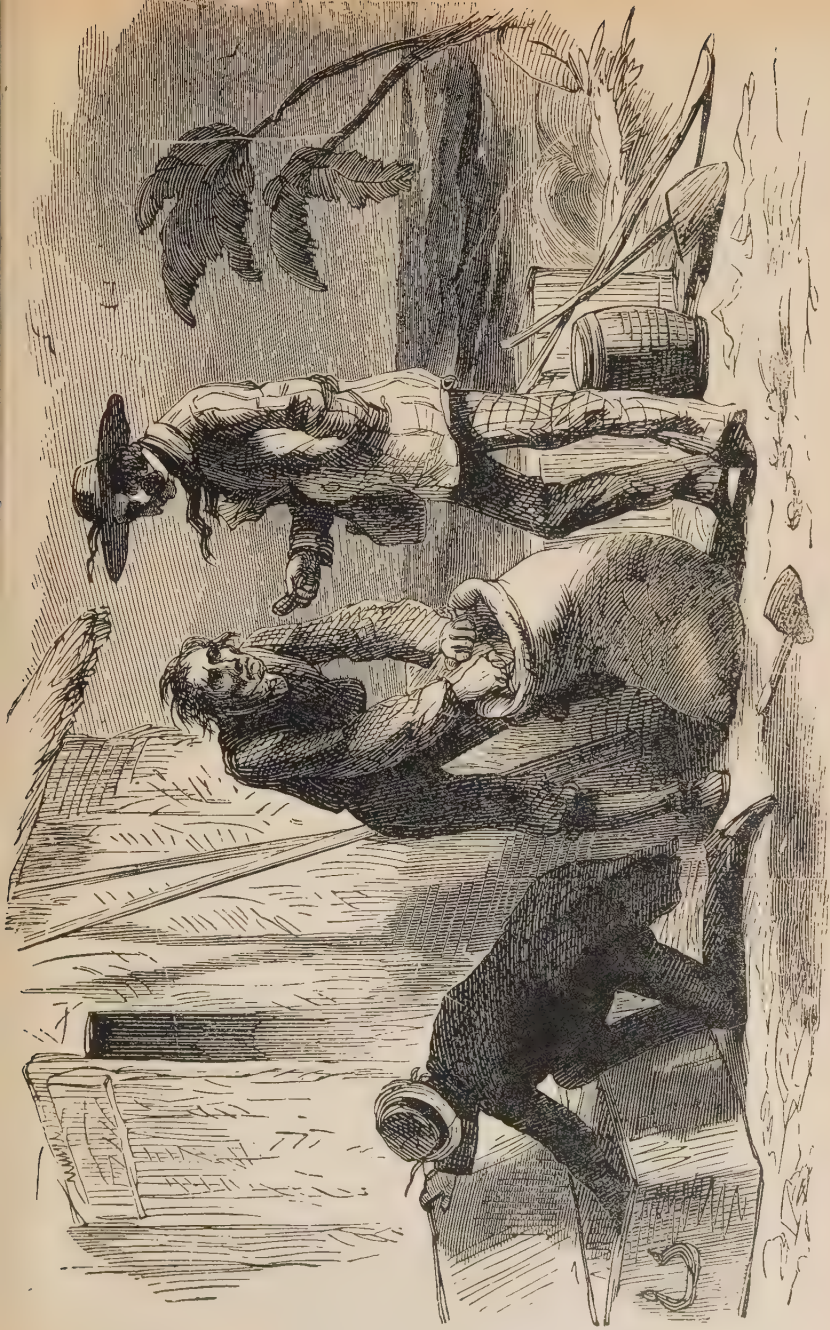
[127] fameless,

ABENIKI CALDWELL



"Gripping the furious tiger by his furry throat"

fameless, blameless youth, and may'st thou evermore be safe from the savage Sheikhs and the snub-nosed Normans."



"'Twas none other than Charles II. of England"

ABENIKI CALDWELL

At this sonorous and able peroration the two men had at me and made as if to shake me by the hand in approbation ; but being ever of modest demeanor, I covered my eyes, saying, “ ’Tis naught, ’tis naught ! ” and from that moment were we all fast friends. Farragut was faster than I, but Charles was fastest of the lot, and by the same token sat we down to devise our plans.

To it briefly, then. They had come to the island with full fell purpose of plundering and conveying away the gold and treasure deep buried there by Cossimbazar, King of the Incas.

“ Odso ! ” quoth I, when that this had been vented unto me.

“ Be that as it may ! ” cried Admiral Farragut wrathfully enough, “ but know, thou Saxon yeoman, that my father was a Spaniard, and therefore on me and none other devolves the dastard duty of rescuing the royal rubies and grasping the graven gold ! ”

I consented outwardly enough, but a suffocating doubt eddied all miserably through my



“ I covered my eyes, saying, ‘Tis naught, ’t is naught’ ”

ABENIKI CALDWELL

staunch heart, for full well I knew their merry badinage was but a cloak covering a deep, dark, and deadly plot to kill and assassinate me even at the even.

But of this breathed I naught, and for many days we sought the buried gold, carrying always our trusty, rusty muskets in case of need.

I bided my time, for I was ever of patient demeanor, but even while discoursing with the Admiral in doleful panegyric, or mumming with Charles in merry-making mood, I anon revolved in my secret heart a plan of escape.

But even as I mused the sultry sun went down in a golden glow of glory and the blue mountains of Sahara showed clear against the horizon.

“Now!” hissed both my enemies at once, and with demoniac shrieks they sprang at me and grasped my either arm.

But in that awful moment the truth was revealed to me, and I cursed myself for my afore-time blindness.



"For many days we sought the buried gold"

ABENIKI CALDWELL

These hilding fellows were not what I deemed them. All basely had they lied in their scurvy throats when they allotted unto themselves exalted names that were in no wise their right.

I struggled not, nor strove to free myself, but as the coward caitiffs stood, one at my right side and one at my left, I looked both squarely in the face and said, "Ha!"

As I had apprehended, both villains fell to their knees and begged for mercy. Marry! how the craven knaves wept and grovelled at my either foot.

"We meant no harm!" stammered the one I had called Charles, the tears streaming down his flower-like face; "we but caressed thee, as a mark of loyal affection."

"*Vide licet*," I replied (which is to say, "I perceive thou liest"), "and therefore, though so easy a death were too great a guerdon, I thus avenge thy deed."

After these words, uttered in a mild, majestic

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tone,

THE LOYALTY OF LORRAINE

tone, I ran him through with my sword, and he ran away.

Turned I then to the other bold outlaw.

“Hark, thee, minion,” I cried in unbridled rage, “ere sets the sun, the red-gold sun, send I a shaft clean through thy skulking heart. Pleas, complaints, prayers alike are vain; in one brief moment shalt thou reap the rife reward of thy foul, false life. Ha, fiend! thinkest thou to escape? Nay, by the bloody bones of St. Ping-Pong, thou shalt even now drop darkling to thy dread doom! Know, thou Saxon churl, that in this erstwhile tranquil heart thou hast raised a savage rage, a fuming, fiery fury that shall engulf thee, and hurling venomous maledictions and crashing execrations at thy demoniac head shall drag thee, shrieking, to thy dissolution!”

My oratory quite carried him away, and though I sought him diligently for days, yet nevermore saw I the rough, kindly face and brawny brow of my would-be murderer.

ABENIKI CALDWELL

Now turn we yet anon to the aged alchemist who lived in a haunted hut, half hidden in the bramble-brae.

Straight to him I trudged, and with fair obeisance saluted him and he me again.



“Hola!” I cried, to attract his attention, for he was immersed in his seething, bubbling liquids.

“Begone, Varlet,” he growled; but unheeding his retort, I stumbled over it and broke it.

“*“Begone, Varlet,” he growled*”

This irated him fearsomely, and seizing a crucible in either hand he was for me at once.

“Soft, soft, good father,” quoth I, “I come but for thy sage advice and assistance, and with good gold will I well repay thee.”

THE LOYALTY OF LORRAINE

At bare mention of gold the old alchemist simmered down, and, peering at me from beneath his bushy spectacles, thus spake :

“And what would'st thou, rash youth? Desirest thou to wrest the secrets of futurity from the grim heart of Fate?”

“Of a truth,” quoth I, “I crave but one small boon. I would be a prince.”

“A prince, forbye! Ha, 'tis easy, an we but hoodwink the Fates. Hist, I take thy horoscope.”

Assuming a graceful position, I smiled, but withal inscrutably, while yet the old alchemist set his quadrant and adjusted his focusses.

Followed a faint, sizzling smell, and a pale, thick odor as of asphodel, rose to mine ears.

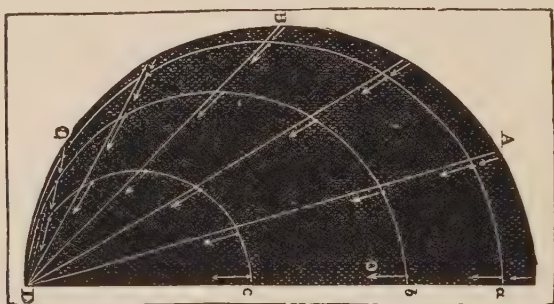
But when, at long last, the smoke cleared away, all plainly on the whitewashed wall could be discerned the subjoined diagram.

Eagerly the old alchemist scanned the shadowy shape. “'Tis grave, 'tis grave,” he muttered.

ABENIKI CALDWELL

“It looks not like a grave,” I made bold to suggest.

“Nay, Varlet, hold thou thy tongue! These arrows betoken thy death. Aye, death, at the hands of fierce and savage Indians. Beware



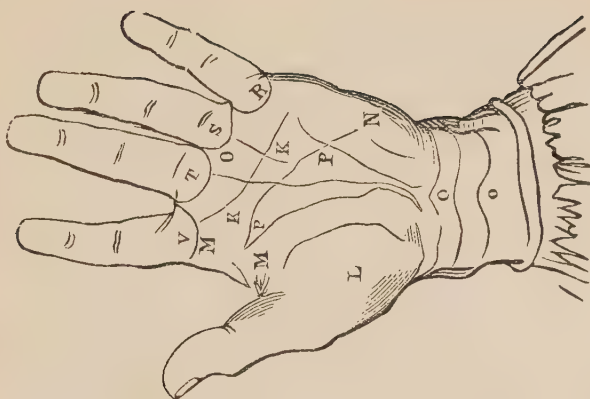
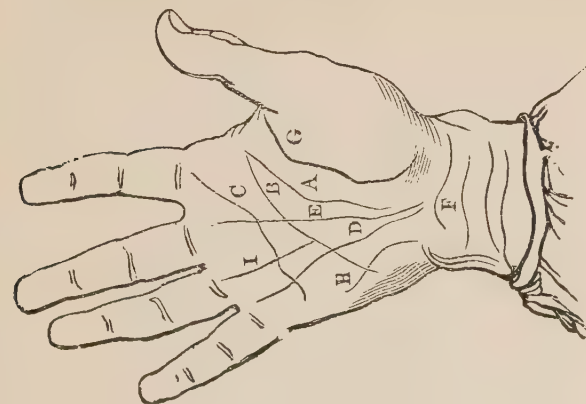
“The subjoined diagram”

thou of wigwams, and let not thy feet stray where the tomahawk flieth. Hold up thine hands!”

In simple obedience I raised my psychic, patrician hands to his ken.

“All is thine,” he said, and his voice rang with a passionate indifference. “’Tis here writ that thy dear desire shall be fulfilled. A prince

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“ My psychic, patrician hands ”

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shalt thou be, and a right royal one. But of a truth thy destiny is controlled by the Arch-



*“A termagant demon ending
in horns and hoofs”*

Fiend, and unless thou may'st placate him all thy strivings for princehood are but vain.”

THE LOYALTY OF LORRAINE

“Ha!” cried I, in all the ardor of my youthful enthusiasm, “show him to me!”

The old alchemist stood upright, as, grovelling on the ground, he pronounced a spell.

Burst then forth from the groaning earth a most fearsome volume of smoke and flame, disclosing, as it rolled away, the figure of a termagant demon ending in horns and hoofs.

I shuddered and shrieked, as one aghast at a ghost.

“Peace, peace!” I cried. “I desire not tampering and trinketing with the Powers of Darkness. Peace!”

“Aye,” said the apparition, in a mocking subterranean voice, “aye, well may’st thou tremble, thou paltry stripling! Well may’st thou shiver in thy buskins at sight of me, for in my hand hold I thy destiny.”

“Give it me,” quoth I, for in no way could I see how it might be of use to him.

“An thou payest,” he responded in a sizzling whisper.

ABENIKI CALDWELL

Now, ever had I been taught to give the Devil his due, so producing my scrip I said, "How much?"

"Nay," he replied, "I desire not gold, but of thy bounty I beg a greater boon."

"Name it," quoth I, though all fearfully I feared his request.

The demoniac face drew nearer mine own, and in my shivering, shrivelling ear a lurid voice hissed and sissed :

"I command of thee a dozen yard-long spoons. Fain would I invite some friends to sup."

CHAPTER VIII

THE SIX-SIDED SQUARE

THE hush of the horizon and the gentle twitter of the cerulean zenith sank all peacefully o'er the multitudinous tiny islands that gem the glassy expanse of the interior of Tuscany. A fierce tumult hung like a sodden pall over the strife-stricken city.

No one was visible in the deserted streets, and all pedestrians and by-standers were garbed in bombazine of deepest black.

Crape streamers fluttered dolefully from every door-bell, and each window showed its wreath of immortelles.

"There's something toward," muttered Abeniki Caldwell, as he strode, hot-foot, into the very heart of the city.

But being of marvellous discreet and conservative disposition, he formed no rash or hasty opinion. Howbeit, after deep pondering and judicious consideration of evidence, he concluded that somebody must be dead.

ABENIKI CALDWELL

And even as he watched, he beheld an endless procession of the black-robed citizens hastening at great speed to the King's palace.



“An endless procession of the black-robed citizens hastening at great speed to the King's palace”

“Good yeoman,” said Abeniki, addressing one of these, “who be ye, and why hasten ye thus to the King's palace?”

“The young Prince is dead,” quoth the citizen, “and we but go to make dole and lamentation.”

At these words a glorious glimmer broke upon the mysterious mentality of Abeniki Caldwell. Who shall say what sinister scheme seethed in the abysses of his sinuous soul?

All impenetrable, he stood in a recumbent posture, no less sincere than delusive, when, with

THE SIX-SIDED SQUARE

agony depicted in every step, his weary feet broke forth into exclamations of triumphant fury.



“The armed guards”

In mad haste he trundled to the palace ; with beetling brows and ireful eyes he boldly demanded secret conclave with the King.

Being refused, he flew into a blazing passion, he towered, he glowered, he drew his sword on the armed guards, ran them through, and then ran through them, and arrived dishevelled and breathless in the King’s antechamber.

ABENIKI CALDWELL

Here met he a pale, pompous personage, none other than my Lord Wimbert.

“Hey, and what ho!” quoth Wimbert, who was ever of merry manner. “What is thy business, young sir? Wouldst advise the King in his counsel, or lay down laws for the Queen?”

I smiled inwardly at his close though unwitting guess, but with a Delsarte gesture expressive of courteous contempt I waved him aside.

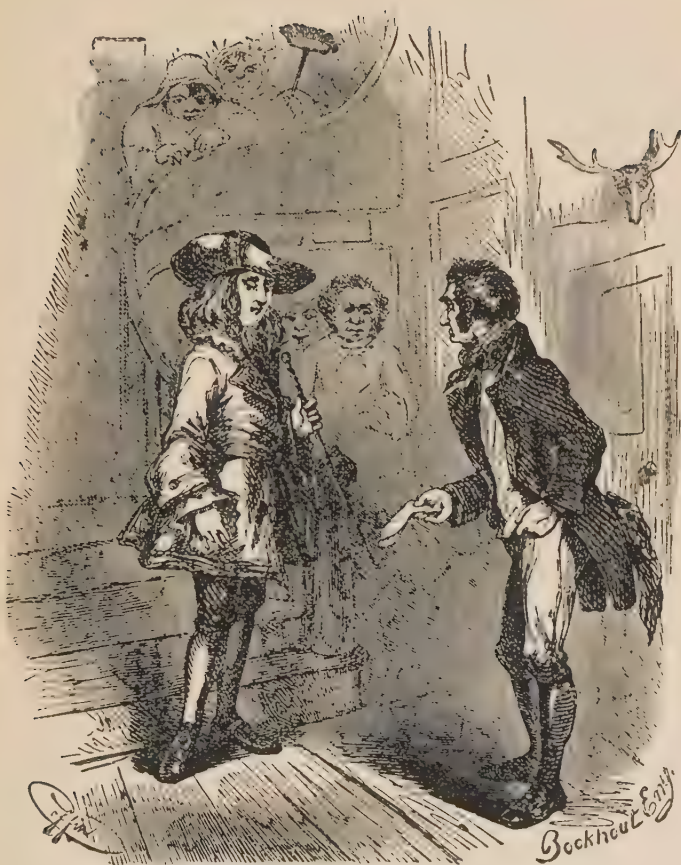
He returned immediately, and all persistently blocked my way.

“Avaunt, Varlet!” I cried, “’t is the King I seek, and have a care, lest thy prostrate carcass prove but a footpath to his Majesty!”

Lord Wimbert winked wheedlingly.

“Ah, pretty youth,” quoth he, “an thou listenest not to me, thy life is *in articulo mortis*, which is, being interpreted, a mortgaged article.”

“Ha!” cried I, “thou pratest right lustily, and yet, for a pin’s fee, would I sheathe my javelin in thy lack-wit lungs.”



"He returned immediately, and all persistently blocked my way"

ABENIKI CALDWELL

“Hey-day, cockscomb!” said Wimbart, still merry of face, “an thou heedest me not, within the hour shalt thy javelin drop from thy cold and death-stiffened hand.”

“Have done this fool speech!” cried I, all agog with rage; but even as I had at him, he whispered:

“Of a pity, boy, hold! I am thy father!”

Tears of joy, woe, mortification, triumph, and despair coursed successively adown my marble brow.

All silently I glared at my apparent parent, then, throwing down my arms, I fell into his.

“Father!” I cried, and the word thrilled through lingering latitudes of nebulous space.

“Father, forsooth!” I continued, “and what is *one* father? I demand more fathers, forefathers, eight fathers, — aye, a long line of successive fathers, whose green graves shall form the leaves of a noble ancestral tree.”

“All this is thine!” exclaimed my father, as he drew from his gabardine pocket a parchment



“Throwing down my arms, I fell into his”

ABENIKI CALDWELL

roll. "Child, take thou this, and go thy way ; then when one askest of thee thy lineage and descent, show him the screed I gave thee, and I warrant thy heritage is assured."

He grasped me warmly by the hand, and in my great gratitude I shook the old man heartily and proceeded to advance into the royal presence.

Now King Henry VIII. was a man of much royal presence, and though a bold and valiant knight as might ever be, I found myself a bit fearsome when I faced him.

His imposing figure was bewrapped in a robe of ermine, and his royal crown sat squarely on his bald head.

"Who art thou, and what want'st thou of me?" quoth the King, all querulously, for he was of an irritable and imbecile temper, and stayed never for long of a good nature.

"Oh, noble King," I began in my simple straightforward way, as I was ever wont, "Monarch of all Monarchs, Henry of all Henries, Benedick of all Benedicks, thy beauteous son, the

THE SIX-SIDED SQUARE

fair and fat young Prince, is no more. Alas, we all alas for that. But sith it be so I am come, in all modesty, to make humble profferance of myself as a substitute son. Think, O King, a ready-made son and Prince is here for thee ; one who will be a credit to thee and to thy court ; one whose princeliness is beyond all compare, whose courtly demeanor and valiant valor are the royal result of a long ancestral line of noble and peerless progenitors.”

“Ha !” quoth King Henry VIII., rubbing his royal nose with his kingly forefinger, “but I know thee not.”

“Ah, Sire,” quoth I, “’t is but a mishap Time will remedy.”

“True, true,” mused the great and wide monarch, “but thy name, — thy credentials ?”

I paused in turn. Then, like a flash, I be-thought me of the parchment roll my father, Lord Wimbert, had given me, and with a flourish no less grandiloquent than magniloquent I spread the scroll before his royal eyes.

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“Behold,” I cried, “my family tree! Behold the succession of noble warriors, whose strength and prowess, transmitted from father to son, have culminated in one, the last scion of the fair house of Caldwell, — Abeniki, who all pridefully bows low before thee.”

I stood, with my feet in the air, waiting the King’s decree.

Henry looked with thoughtfulness on the depicted features of thirteen of my ancestry.

“Zooks!” he exclaimed at last, “these be worthy fellows and most marvellous handsome. Abeniki Caldwell,” and he laid his fat hand on my shoulder with a gentle touch, as of a battering-ram, “the Princehood is thine! Hie thee now to the Court Tailor and bid him see to it that the Imperial Asterisk and Royal Rhododendron be embroidered upon thy doublet.”

With stately gait, as of an ice-wagon, King Henry moved toward me, and in very ecstasy of gibbering joy I kissed the great hand of the great monarch.



“ The depicted features of thirteen of my ancestry

ABENIKI CALDWELL

Then went I out boldly to exercise my new vocation. In all haste I collected a royal retinue, and then went I to choose my apartments in the palace.



*"The Imperial Asterisk and
Royal Rhododendron"*

The rooms of the late Prince were gorgeous in their sumptuous magnificence, but with a regal disregard of expenditure I ordered them decked anew for my use.

Katherine of Arragon was Queen for the nonce, and to her, as Queen-mother, paid I gallant court. Right fairly praised she my beauty and wit, but I said, "Arra g' on, you're only foolin'," whereupon she laughed gaily as of a great mischief.

But withal, oft seemed she of a sad melancholy.

"What ails?" quoth I at such time.



"Queen Katherine"

ABENIKI CALDWELL

“’Tis naught, ’tis naught,” she replied, striving to staunch the tears that trickled down o’er her pearl-beaded stomacher. “’Tis but the King hath given me warning, and I must leave when that my month is up.”

“Ah!” said I, sore concerned, “and who cometh in thy place?”

“Methinks Anne Boleyn,” she answered pensively.

“So? A fair wench and a gay one,” said I heartily, but making observance of the anger in her either eye, I added hastily, “but she hath the fiend’s own temper and is as ignorant as a duncecap.”

Queen Katherine smiled gladly.

“’Tis so,” she cried, “and a direful dance she will lead the King, methinks! ’Faith, ’t would be fun to see the sport.”

“Whither goest?” I asked, though my thoughts were even already welcoming the coming, while speeding the parting Queen.

“I know not,” she replied, “and of a troth, I



"Queen Anne"

ABENIKI CALDWELL

care less, save that I grieve to leave thee, my Princeling."

"Nay, trouble not o'er that, fair lady," quoth I, "for I care not a doit. But, an thou wilt, of thy goodness, leave me thy ruby tiara, for a gift to my future bride."

Now though sour of temper and vinegarish of aspect was Queen Katherine, yet was she of right generous heart, and all gladly shone her countenance as she ran to her jewel-case to fetch the trinket. This, then, was how I happened to have the ruby tiara in my possession, and ere it crowned the fair head of my lovely Berenice, 't was fated to bring about many thrilling adventures.

But of that, anon. My task is faithfully to chronicle the events of a calm, well-spent life, and I may not anticipate.

So Katherine went, and Anne Boleyn came, a mad, merry witch as might ever be, and King Henry would oft sorely suffer from the mischievous pranks she elected to play upon him.



"The palace rebuilt"

ABENIKI CALDWELL

“Thou art my football,” she would say to him, and rolling the monarch upon the floor, she would kick him with the jewelled toe of her dainty slipper, and laugh like the chime of a Chinese gong.

Then would King Henry pick himself up, and vow that she was a good-for-naught jade and should be beheaded. But that he threatened full several times before the execution really occurred.

Yet so was Queen Anne of a mood to carry all before her. The very palace, forsooth, must be all unbuilt and builded again.

“’T is but indifferent fine,” quoth she, “and ill befits a Queen of mine own rare fairness.”

And ’faith the jade spoke of a truth, and the old Norman structure fell, to rise again a noble monument to the yclept Queen Anne architecture.

By the rood of St. Winnipeg, well do I remember the night we banqueted first in the new dining-hall. Loud rang the rafters with our

THE SIX-SIDED SQUARE

merry jests and japes as the fat, frolicsome King, all uncrowned and unmonarched, pitted his wit against mine own in making brave and bonny toasts to her dimpled, mischievous Majesty.



“Brave and bonny toasts to her dimpled, mischievous Majesty”

CHAPTER IX

THE COUNTERFEIT TICKET

ZOUNDS, but I was a roistering Prince, and merry. With pibroch and gorget I led my courtiers a lively dance, and full well they liked it. Daily the welkin rang, and anon the curfew tolled, but Prince Abeniki was ever the darling of the court. I wound and unwound my bugle-horn, and my huntsmen trolled catches as we hounded the hounds.

“But, marry,” quoth I to myself, “’t is time I should marry. As the Eastern proverb hath it, *Ignoti nulla Cupido*, which is to say, ‘No one ignores Cupid.’ And by Cupid, a royal Prince hath a fair show at the hand of even a Lady Berenice of Bois-Bracy.”

And so it came to pass that I set forth with all speed to seek again my lovely lady of the lilac eyes.

I gat me together a royal retinue of surpassing splendor, and, gaily prancing, we rode forth our way through the fastnesses of the forest and



“ A royal retinue of surpassing splendor ”

ABENIKI CALDWELL

came anon to the summit of a distant valley where the mountain-tops lay in level luxuriance along the dusty highway.

As I gazed silently upon the noble castle of Bois-Bracy, which was hidden from view by a



"I wound and unwound my bugle-horn"

projecting aperture in the horizon above, a thousand thoughts seethed in my bubbling brain. Yet even now were we fast by the postern

moat, and I must needs alight and make intent of admittance.

"Hola!" I cried, and wound all lustily my bugle-horn.

Back whizzed the bolts, down came the bridge with a clang, and out rushed the Baron of Bois-Bracy with a ringing shout of greeting. Now, by my head, never, I trow, was such a royal

THE COUNTERFEIT TICKET

welcome accorded to any man. Flags were flung, bells were rung, harps were strung, and songs were sung.

And all, forsooth, in honor of Prince Abeniki, the pseudo son of a quondam father, the heir-apparent of the good and pious King Henry VIII.

Minding me of my high position, I stood all supercilious on the threshold and sniffed the air.

“Noble Prince,” said the Baron,

bowing low before me, “prithee, disdain not to accept the humble cheer our castle affords. Fain would I offer a hospitality worthy of thy royal rank, but alas, these rude appointments are my best. Yet deign, I beseech thee, so to demean thyself as to enter my paltry hut, and



“Down came the bridge with a clang”

ABENIKI CALDWELL

hallow it forever with the memory of thy noble presence.”

Still of a sneering smirk, I gazed abstractedly at the Baron as though I heeded him not. And yet, by the great Horned Toad, he was of imposing effect.

Robed in a tunic of azure green, furred with ermine and slashed with scarlet sage, standing eight feet high in his buskined sandals, and bearing over each shoulder a boar-spear studded with great jewels, he was a brave representative of the middle-class Baron of his day.

Rude and untutored of address, as might he well be who had never wandered from his own mural banks to visit the adjacent firmament, yet withal was he the father of my fair pet, my cosset, my duck, the lovely, lively Berenice.

“Peace, peace, humble Baron,” quoth I, all lordly-wise, “sith it be of a necessity, I enter thy hovel. And this with purpose of conferring on thy daughter, the Lady Berenice of Bois-Bracy, my royal hand in marriage.”

THE COUNTERFEIT TICKET

“My son!” cried the Baron, falling on my neck, but by good chance cutting not off my head with his bristling boar-spears.

“Now, by my faith,” quoth I to myself, “thus have I gained three fathers in a rapid succession. But it boots not, for ’t is oft a Prince’s whim to make a collection of this or that, and I may yet make farther acquirement.”

“Would’st see thy betrothed bride?” asked the Baron, dancing about in his excitement and delightment until his wig was awry and his doublet undoubled.

“Aye, that would I, and with all haste!” I stormed, and then I stamped and swashed about in a fury, being desirous to inform them of my hot, choleric temper, as is ever befitting a Prince of the Blood.

“Why tarrieth she?” I fumed. “Is she perchance philandering with some rustic swain, all unwitting of the royal honor awaiting her? Zounds! by the hiss of the sissing serpents, why cometh she not? Have a care, Baron of

ABENIKI CALDWELL

Bois-Bracy, or I may repent me of this fool's errand, and take otherwhere my betrothal gifts."

"Prithee, my royal master, say not so," pleaded the Baron, "my daughter cometh e'en now. She stayed but to deck herself in fit garb to meet so royal a lover. Ha! she approacheth."

I turned, and by the beard of St. Valentine, what a sight met my gaping gaze!

It was in truth my lovely love, my bonny Baroness Berenice, the idol of my heart, the pineapple of my eye.

Only a quill from a bird o' paradise might make a pen fit to describe my charmer's charms.

In stature a *petite* Amazon, the Lady Berenice bore herself with a stately grace as of an Aphrodite crossing the Delaware.

Her countenance, so passing fair, was of pure Saxon blonde, and her olive skin and beetling eyebrows betokened a disposition both sweet and mild.

Her hair was like the red, red rose, and, braided with pearls, hung adown her shoulder blades.



“Accept from my humble haughty hand this priceless present”

ABENIKI CALDWELL

Garbed in a kirtle of pink plush, and followed by her lady-in-waiting, she approached, all timidly, into my august presence.

“Ineffable Flower of Femininity,” I began, in my plain, simple way, “behold before thee a suitor of splendor and superiority. I, son and scion of King Henry VIII., royal heir of Mother England and Farther India, nobly and magnanimously offer betrothal to thee, oh, Baroness Berenice of Bois-Bracy. Accept from my humble haughty hand this priceless present of a ruby tiara, whose gems were mined for thee, mine own, by me, the mine owner. Oh, Lady of Countless Charms, take me for thy Count; oh, Peerless Beauty, accept me as thy Peer; oh, Matchless One, let me be thy match!”|

As I paused for a reply, I perceived that my eloquence must have struck her forcibly.

Her color fled, and she dropped her eyes; then her face fell, and in a moment she completely lost her head.



“ Ah, that walk through the wild wood ! ”

ABENIKI CALDWELL

Howbeit, this disturbed me not, for I purposed myself to be the head of the family, and apparently unheeding how she had gone to pieces, I took her apart and begged her to pull herself together.

Ah, that walk through the wild wood ! E'en now my memory lingers lovingly on its happy, childish joy. My Berenice hung trustfully on my manly arm, her violet velvet veil falling in graceful folds adown her satin skirt.

All playfully we plucked flowers for a nose-gay, and the village children gambolled gaily in our path.

Life unrolled before us a dulcet dream of buoyant beauty, and the fair outlook of my forthcoming future roused my infuriated mind to a tranquillity like that of heaven.

We saw the feathered cattle grazing on the gilded domes of the ocean, and in bucolic glee we watched the tiny yellow chicks run in and out of their *coup de plume*.

But alas, aye, thrice alas for the happy hopes

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"Disguised as a Quaker priest"

ABENIKI CALDWELL

of youth! Even as we meandered, recking naught of evil portent, Nemesis tracked our wake. Low lurking behind us sneaked the slinking form and ribald, opprobrious countenance of the villain of this tale.

By my sooth, I do mightily hesitate to introduce a rascal so sorrily besmirched with all iniquity; for if ever existed a bad man, wrong-doer, worker of evil, sinner, scoundrel, villain, miscreant, caitiff, wretch, reptile, viper, serpent, scamp, scapegrace, reprobate, rough, rowdy, ruffian, bully, blackguard, varlet, kern, lown, loon, runnion, outcast, and vagabond, 't was Habakkuk Hobbs of Harwich.

Disguised as a Quaker priest he frequented Marston Moor in the murk o' midnight, and many a luckless wight rued the day when he fell unwarily into the hands of this fell foe.

I, all unwitting of danger, felt no tittle of fear, and right merrily we whiled away the days of my tarrying at the castle of Bois-Bracy. Oft would I play at cards with the Baron; and anon,



“Oft would I play at cards with the Baron”

ABENIKI CALDWELL

when his good mulled ale had made our heads and heels of more lightness, would we, in tricky sport, dance a fandango o'er the finished flagons.

“Now, by the Mass, thou art a bully knight,”



*“Ever and anon would I bound
upright in my bed”*

the old Baron would cry, all a-pant with his lusty swaggering, “and right well do I joy in the fellowship of my pleasant son-in-law.”

But though all gaily sped the days in boisterous roistering, yet oft in the weary watches of the night came monstrous fears and horrors to me-ward. Ever and anon would I bound upright in my bed, sick with affright for that I beheld a fearsome vision.

And ever was this weird vision the same ; ever was it the grim, grimy face and long, lank form of Habakkuk Hobbs, riding upon a pale white *hors concours*, which is but Spanish for a race-horse.



"A fandango o'er the finished flagons"

ABENIKI CALDWELL

To me spake he with an ill tongue, saying :
“ Ha, Prince! Ha, Prince!”

“ The saints shield us!” cried I, sore afeard.
“ What portendeth this vile visitation?”

A rattling laugh resounded hollowly through the darkness, and my flesh crept until I found myself on the other side of the room, shivering anear the chimney-corner.

“ Ha, Prince!” went on the gibing, jeering, yet withal gibbering voice, “ think’st thou to wed the lady whom thou call’st Berenice? Nay, lad, — nay, fond lover, not she, not she! Ha, ha! Ha, ha!”

The vision shook and chuckled in fiendish glee, and so wroth was I that I cried in raging anger :

“ This is a foul hearing, and thou art a lying knave! Begone!”

He bewent speedily, and as he vanished I heard him again calling, “ Not she, not she! Ha, ha!”

When that I recounted to Lady Berenice of



“Habakkuk Hobbs, riding upon a pale white hors concours”

ABENIKI CALDWELL

the vision she made ever much sorrow and dole out of all measure.

“A villain and a traitor is Habakkuk Hobbs,” quoth she, “but, alas, and alack-a-day, he speaketh ever of a truth. Oft hath he foretold of fortune, and by the rood, aye followeth the fortune his word. Woe, woe is me !”

“Nay, Love,” quoth I, “never shall his knavish trickery perform ill to us. Sithence thou art my betrothed, naught can work our undoing, and ’tis yet but a se’nnight ere I take thee to my ancestral home, the fair palace of good King Henry VIII. There ’mid feasting and revelry shall we be wed, and none shall say us nay. Come, Love, let us meander by the brooklet that rippleth in the grove.”

Forth we wended, my lovely Berenice and I ; arm in arm walked we through the shady dell, when of a sudden appeared in our path a strange figure.

’T was an ancient, withered hag, whose unkempt locks hung like writhing snakes about her



“ She pointed her skinny forefinger at me and groaned all hollowly ”

ABENIKI CALDWELL

bony shoulders. Garbed in a ragged, untidy gown, which was, forsooth, better than nothing, she pointed her skinny forefinger at me and groaned all hollowly : “ Beware ! beware ! ”

I clasped the hand of my Berenice for support, and murmured faintly : “ Aye.”

All unheeding, the old crone continued :

“ Beware, brave knight, and fair lady ! Listen to the Gipsy’s warning ! Dangers await thee ; dungeons yawn for thee. Thy doom is fallen. Thy fate is sealed. But hearken, ere too late, to the voice of the Gipsy. Beware, ah, ever beware of Habakkuk Hobbs ! ”

Now though I had long beworn of this vile villain, after the Gipsy’s warning I bewore more stoutly than ever.

CHAPTER X

THE ISABEL SCARF

NOW beshrew me, but 't was a gay and glittering cavalcade that set off for the King's palace.

So much of the journey as was to be accomplished by water we traversed in a gilded shallop manned by a crew of Polish galley-slaves.

As, stripped to the waist, they plied their oars, we might almost be said to have scudded under bare poles.

Yarely we flew along, and in merry mood I trolled catches, or, for I was ever quick at repertoire, jested gaily with the Baron. Anon I paced the deck in the company of my betrothed, and when that we might be concealed by a mast or a tops'l, then kist we with all tenderness.

And so came we at long last to the palace, and there were we given good greeting by my father, Henry VIII., and his new wife, she that was Jane Seymour.

“Ha,” said I to my Berenice, when that we

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were alone, "I like not the complexion of my newest mother."

"'Faith and 't is easily changed, then," quoth my Berenice, who was ever observant.

"Nay, wench," quoth I, "but of a verity, I smell treason. Queen Jane hath an evil gleam in her eye when she looketh on thee, and I fear me it bodeeth us ill."

"Beseech you, let us then flee," quoth Berenice, who was ready of wit and quick at contrivance.

"'T would be wise, perchance," said I, "but we have no other shelter; and though life in a roofless hut would be a joy with thee to share it, yet we have not the hut at command."

"Thou speakest of a truth," said Berenice, sagely nodding her bonny head and glancing admiringly round at the slippery stained-glass floors and gay curtained chandeliers that decked the royal palace.

Alas, even as we thus parleyed, peril played about our path and direful danger danced around our doom.

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For all suddenly appeared Habakkuk Hobbs of Harwich, and demanded audience with King Henry VIII.

“Now, marry beshrew,” thought I, “there’s something toward. It liketh me not that the ruffian thus followeth us. But ’t is up to me to compass his despatchment, and gadzooks ! by my trusty broadsword, he’s dead, easy !”

Thus musing, I sauntered carelessly into the throne-room, where my fat father held discourse with the villainous Habakkuk.

There, to my surprise, I found the King in a fierce anger, and nigh raging into a fit.

The blood had flown to his royal face, making it of a vivid blue hue, and agog with ire at the vile interloper who had thus disturbed my lovely sire, I flew at Hobbs and made thrust at him with my ramekin.

“Peace, rash youth,” said Habakkuk in low, shrill tones, as he parried my blade, “I bring evil news, aye, but by the Oriflamme and Coriander ’t is true and none may disprove it. Ha, ha !”

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His fiendish laugh rang out like the chuckle of a dissolute devil, and maddened by his insolent nose, I broke my arblast over his fool's pate.

"Helen Fury!" he cried, "now by the beard of a lobster shalt thou know the worst! Listen, thou pibroch-playing, sack-guzzling Prince; thy beworshipped Bride, thy dainty duck is no Baroness, no Berenice, but of a truth she is Molly Mog, the Innkeeper's daughter. Ha, ha!"

Blinded with rage, I called for an eye-opener, and as by its aid I saw double, I found no difficulty in hitting one or other of the two Hobbsses that confronted me.

"Twin villains!" I cried, "take that! and that!" and hitting them both, I laid them prostrate on the floor.

Then turning, I faced King Henry and the situation. "Daddyking," said I, for I was ever fond of the old man, "bother not thy bald head on the troubles of thy son and heir. I trow yon fool lied in his throat, but, if be that my

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betrothed is really Molly Mog, then the glorious glimmer of my glittering future is indeed dimmed and damned."

"Oh, luddy, fuddy, fuddikins!" groaned the distracted King. "Woe is me, and lack-a-daisy! Never could I drink thy nuptial health across a bar sinister. Alas! alas!"

But I cheered him bravely with assumed hopefulness, and set off, laggardly enough, to apprise my loved one of her lowly origin. An evil bell is quickly tolled, and when that I had faithfully recounted the villain's innuendo, my Berenice thus spake:

"Abeniki, Hero of my heart, Lothario of my life, 'tis of a sooth an evil tale thou bringest. Yet an it be true, then is lowly Molly Mog no fair mate for a Prince of the Blood. Do therefore my bidding."

"Fair one," quoth I, kneeling all gracefully at her fairy feet, "thine is it to advise, mine to obey, for well do I ken thy brawn of brain, and full well know I thy worth of wit. Say soothly then,

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my fair sage, and it shall go hard with me, but I follow thy wise word."

A smile wreathed the lips of my liege lady, albeit, alas, 't was but a forced smile, as it had been done up in a curl-paper o'ernight, and with a tear rolling adown her patrician nose she said:

"Hark, thee, then, but confide not in Queen Katherine, for ever she seeketh to do us hurt. Betake thyself, therefore, with all speed to Oak-ingham, and there inquire for the sign of the Purple Cow. Once at the Inn, say naught to no one until thou shalt have hearing of old Moses Mog, the Innkeeper. He will tell thee all, and at his avisement go thou thy further way."

As I had ever confidence in the wisdom of my Berenice, I strode me forward at once to proceed at her order.

But ere I hasted forth I bade farewell to the assembled family. Struck with surprise, they showed blank faces at the news of my going, but all unheeding I gave them good den, and made off.

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I skirted the forest warily, for unseen foes were visible in its dark and dingly depths. But as I pelted pell-mell through the brushwood, and came by a piece of open, I stopped, aghast with hideous horror, for in my path stood a stalwart form, none other than the scurvy losel, Hobbs!

Though I was all unarmed, and my fierce antagonist carried bowie, spear, and pistols, yet was I no white-livered milksop, and I had at him bravely.

"Villain," I hissed atween my tightly closed lips, "thou'rt a dead man! Fool, to thine orisons, ere yet I strike thee thy final blow!"

Habakkuk Hobbs clicked as of old his demoniac chuckle.

"Ha!" he sneered, "wilt kill me, Sirrah? And how, prithee? With thy little finger, or with a twig from yon sycamore tree?"

Now albeit I scorned the fellow's jeers, yet withal were they well chosen, for trusty blade had I none, nor was like to have.

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"These I grasped right stoutly"

But even as I paused to listen to his words
saw I my love, my Berenice, hasting to me with
concealed weapons.

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These I grasped right stoutly, and slashing the base villain until he was as full of stabs as my lady's pincushion, I tossed him over a fence into a thicket full two leagues distant and turned me to my fair rescuer.

"Damosel," I said, dropping on one knee, and then on the other, "’twere well I were here to use these ungainly weapons on yonder brute. Else had'st thou been all unable to protect thy life from the fierce foe.

But sithence thou art safe, fain would I know why thou walkest in the forest alone and unattended. Methinks ’tis unseemly in so young and fair a lady."



*"I tossed him over a fence
into a thicket"*

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The rose rose to her pale cheeks, and with modest mien the Lady Berenice replied :

“ I but followed thee, my lord, lest thou should'st desire aught that thou had'st forgotten.”

“ Aye, 't is well,” said I half-abstractedly, “ of a truth I did neglect me to bring any weapon ; but 't is naught, I could have conquered the villain unaided. Howbeit sith 't is here, I will keep it by me, and do thou, my love, return to the safety and shelter of my father's palace.”

“ Thou wilt come there to me anon ?” asked the Lady Berenice, as she gazed wistfully at her lover.

“ Aye, that will I,” replied Abeniki Caldwell. “ As the Eastern proverb saith, ‘ Woman is made for man to come back to,’ ere the crescent moon above us shall have waxed and waned, I will return — retur-r-r-n.”

With a farewell kiss, Abeniki Caldwell leaped to horse and dashed away into the fastnesses of the distant hardwoodlands, and the Lady Berenice of Bois-Bracy sadly and silently wended her



"Moses Mog rose from his easy-chair"

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way back to the palace of her mayhap father-in-law, Henry VIII.

Now turn we to the jolly Inn above whose hospitable portal flapped and rattled the sign of the Purple Cow.

Without, a wide expanse of snowy wold; within, a jolly, roisterous, boisterous crew of merry revellers, led in all their jocund mirth by the master spirit, the rollicking, frolicking Inn-keeper, Moses Mog.

To him, seated in his easy-chair, came dashing our hero, Abeniki Caldwell.

“Ha!” cried the newcomer, entering the tavern, “wilt be a father to me? Forsooth, I am but making a collection of that same article.”

Moses Mog, all unused to such sudden and unexpected demands upon his paternity, rose from his easy-chair, dropping his spectacles the while, and replied :

“Hail, and who art thou? A good fellow I trow, for that thou laughest right merrily. The Purple Cow ne’er turneth such from its doors.



“The mayhap mother of my fair fragile love”

ABENIKI CALDWELL

But to father thee! Ha! for all I wot thou may'st be the Arch-Fiend himself in disguise."

"Nor ill-disguised, neither," quoth Abeniki Caldwell, "for an I look like the devil, say me so to my face."

"Nay, nay," quoth Moses Mog, "I but jested. Sit thee, sit thee, fair sir, and o'er a pottle of sack will we yet understand one another. How art thou called?"

"I am Abeniki Caldwell, good sir," quoth I, all unwishing to affright him by my princely title, "and I but called to inquire concerning thy daughter, one Molly, of fair face and gentle temper."

"Molly!" quotha, and his voice was as the quavering of a tremolo pipe. "Peace, peace, man, I will but call her mother."

At his summons appeared his wife, a buxom, brawny dame, and my heart sank as I beheld before me the mayhap mother of my fair fragile love, my so-called Baroness Berenice!

CHAPTER XI

THE IDES OF MARCH

YEA, my young sir," quoth Moses Mog, in answer to my queries, "yea, of a truth, the Baroness Berenice of Bois-Bracy is our daughter Molly; and a bonny braw maid, withal. Well do I mind how she used to serve good ale across this same bar. But along came the Baron, and, being childless, he begged Molly for his daughter. I loved the wench, and had no eye save for her good advancement. So, saith I, 'Take her, Baron, and aye be kind to her.' He promised by his head to love and cherish her as his own, and I let her go. Hast news of her, young sir?"

Now was I sore distraught, for though I loved the lady in question, yet was Molly Mog, an Innkeeper's daughter, a parlous untoward match for a Prince of the Blood.

And withal, as I viewed Moses Mog, and Betsey his wife, methought my Lady Berenice favored her parents, and I remembered me that

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her features were but of a lowly type. "Aye," thought I, deeply pondering, "she hath a red



Moses Mog"

face, bedeckt with freckles, and of a truth, she squinteth."

And yet, by my troth, so strong are Love's chains, and so well forged his fetters, that I might not tear the image of my Berenice from

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my heart, nay, not though she were a thousand times a Mog ! Nay, though my ancestral hopes were dashed to the dust, though untold miseries and humiliations were my portion, though my noble and royal fathers disowned me, yet would I cleave to my liege lady, my leal, loyal love, my Berenice ! I quoth as much to the Mogs, and they upheld me in my resolve.

“Gadzooks !” cried Moses Mog, “thou’rt a fine, strapping youth, a very pattern of a Prince ; and a braw, lively wench like my Molly is none too good for thee. My blessings on thee both, and when the nuptial feast shall be spread, Moses Mog and his Betsey shall join the merry throng and make the royal palace resound with laughter and jest. And for a marriage portion will I give thee an hundred butts of sack and an hundred pottles of nut-brown ale.”

“Aye,” quoth old Betsey Mog, “and I will bestow on my daughter such a setting-out as may well become the bride of a Prince. A linsey gown shall she have for feast-days, and two

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sacking slips for work-a-days. Aye, thus richly shall she be furnished to wed a noble."

"Peace, peace, good mother," quoth I, for well did I perceive she knew not whereof she spake. "Come thou to the banqueting, for at our nuptials shall the palace gates be thrown wide to all, but of a troth, I will the bride's fitting-out provide. Sarsenet shall she have, and taffetas, aye, and jewels, — all these shall her Baron-father give as dowry."

"Aye, so be it," quoth Betsey Mog contentedly. "Then will I but keep the linsey and the sacking to mine own gowns, and sore do I need them."

Waving adieu to the Mogs, I mounted horse, and dashed, post-haste, into the forest.

By 'r lakin, but that was a ride! Day after day I sped on, o'er brake and brier, climbing streams, fording bridges, and when my noble steed, exhausted, fell dead beneath me, I gave him one regretful glance and continued my journey afoot.

THE IDES OF MARCH



"I dashed, post-haste, into the forest"

So reached I the palace, and made hot haste
for the King's apartments.

"Daddyking," I cried, "she *is* the Innkeeper's
daughter! In verity my Berenice is but Molly

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Mog,

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Mog, yet in good sooth I care not! She is Queen of Love and Beauty, and I heed not her lineage sith mine will suffice us both!"

"Ha!" quoth King Henry VIII., "a Mog of the Moggieri! By my faith her ancestral tree is a shady one! Yet stay, my Princekin, 't is not thine thus shortly to dispose of the traditions of thy royal race. Howe'er much thou lovest this Mog maid, yet is she not for thee. No Prince of the Blood may marry a damsel of low degree."

"Ha! sayest thou so?" cried I, my fingers nervously grasping my sword-hilt; "now, though thou art a stout and a stout-hearted Sovereign, yet will I skewer thee through like a blackbird if so be thou puttest a feather of hindrance in my chosen way."

Ere he could reply I turned scornfully on my heel and went in search of my lovely Berenice.

I found her in the blue drawing-room. As I entered she gave me but one glance, and reading the sad truth in my speaking eye, she flung



“She flung herself into my arms and buried her face in my doublet”

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herself into my arms and buried her face in my doublet.

“Not thine! Not thine!” she screamed. “I perceive I am but a Mog, but a Molly Mog, of low degree, of base and ignoble parentage. Ah, woe is me! Alas, alack-a-day!”

“Nay, Sweetheart,” I said, as I patted her vigorously, “despair not, for though a Mog of the Moggses, I will yet raise thee to the title and coronet of a Princess of the Royal House. Howbeit, I fear Queen Jane. Is she not thy vengeful, malicious foe?”

“Not now,” quoth Berenice, lifting her liquid, tearful eyes to mine own. “She is but yesterday replaced by one Anne of Cleves, a kind and gentle dame of great good-will toward me.”

“Now the saints be praised!” quoth I. “She shall intercede for us with King Henry, and all may yet be well.”

I sought Queen Anne, and after the fashion of the court, she received me in her *ruelle*.



"She received me in her ruelle"

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“Madam,” quoth I, dropping gracefully on one knee, for I was ever of courtier-like demeanor, “I am most miserably fortunèd, and I beseech of thy great pity that thou wilt aid and abet my dear designs.”

“Huddup!” quoth Queen Anne, “and who may’st thou be, young Popinjay who thus demandest my artful aid?”

“I am Prince Abeniki,” I responded, “thy lawful son and heir; and sithence thou hast made choice to wed King Henry VIII., so must thou accept the responsibilities of thy position.”

“Now by the Cornucopia of Capricorn!” exclaimed Queen Anne, “ne’er shall it be said that Anne of Cleves failed in marital or maternal duties. My son, my utmost and untiring aid shall be thine; my wit and wisdom are at thy disposal; my shrewdness and cunning shall avail thee much. But haste, tell me thy needs, that I may compass them ere yet I lose my influence o’er my royal spouse.”

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“Aye, madam,” quoth I, well knowing that the King would all too soon turn a deaf ear toward the Queen he now adored so fondly ; and in a trice I had laid before her an account of the sad state of affairs between my Berenice and myself.

“Gadsbodikins !” cried Queen Anne, “now do I scent a frabjous fray ! But fear naught, my bonny boy ; thou hast Anne of Cleves to thy mother, and at her bidding shall thy way lie fair before thee. Yet as the Eastern proverb hath it, ‘’T is a rocky road to doublin’,’ which is to say the course of true love never runs smooth.”

“Aye,” quoth I sadly, “the course of true love is the route of all evil, yet so love I my fair lady that all dangers would I dare, all risks would I run, sithence that I might make her my bride.”

“Aye,” murmured Queen Anne. “Even so spake thy father when that he courted me. And now, forsooth, is he winking with the eye at one Catherine Howard ! Knowest thou the moppet?

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By the Crooked Saints she hath no beauty ; she is not to be mentioned the same day of the week with me ! ”

“ ’Tis true ! ” I cried, being ever agreeable. “ Shouldst I speak of thee on a Monday, ne’er would I mention Catherine Howard till after sunset of a Friday. She hath a blowzy face. ”

“ Aye, ” said Queen Anne with eagerness, “ and a squinting glance. ”

“ And a wry nose. ”

“ And a crooked neck. ”

“ And horny hands. ”

“ And splay feet. ”

“ And a raucous voice. ”

“ And false teeth. ”

“ And a vulgar visage. ”

“ Aye, ” continued Queen Anne, musingly, “ of a troth she be all this and more. The fright, the scarecrow, the eyesore, the harridan, the gaunt, rickety, dumpy monster, I hate her, *hate* her, *hate* her ! ”

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“Peace, peace, woman,” quoth I, for the Queen was waxing red with rage and purple



“Catherine Howard”

with anger and white with ire and green with jealousy, “mind not another’s charm, nor fear the arrival of thy rival. To-day thou’rt Queen; heed not to-morrow’s hap.”

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“Marry beshrew me,” cried Queen Anne, “thou speakest truly; and now to mell with thine affairs. King Henry hath no moiety of tolerance for the Mog woman, and ’t is his order that she be sent packing.”

“Now by the Saturnalian serpents,” quoth I, “this thing shall not be. Packing, forsooth! Here stayeth she, and here stay I, beneath the vaulted roof of my ancestors! ’T is thine, Queen Anne, to compass this.”

“Nay, nay, Abeniki,” said Queen Anne, and her voice was as a soothing salve to my roused ire, “nay, but list to me. Packing shall she go, but by thee accompanied.”

“Ha!” cried I, “an elopement?”

“Aye; and hist whilst I tell thee. This night on the stroke of twelve do thou appear, booted and spurred, in the turret chamber. There will await thee thy Berenice, ready for flight. At the garden wall will be a ladder for thy scaling, and once over, thy way is easy.”

“Aye,” said I, “for it leadeth to love and
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*"I knocked him fell to the floor, and, seizing his own pistol,
I aimed it at his ill-favored villainous face"*

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happiness. Bethank thee, fair madam, for thine aid, and know that the grace I owe thee I shall yet fulfil worshipfully."

Now turn we the castle clock to the midnight hour, and behold we Prince Abeniki all breathlessly stealing to the turret chamber.

Here found he the fair Berenice, seated on an heap of cushions, rare embroidered and bestudded with golden jewels.

"Ha! my love!" quoth she.

"My pride, my bride!" quoth I.

"Yet stay not to kiss me," she protested, as I would have caressed her with tenderness, "for the time is ripe, and e'en now must we proceed with all skill and caution."

Having ever trust in my Berenice's word, I said no more, but stealthily prepared to descend the secret staircase.

But ere I oped the door, a voice from behind the arras cried:

"Stay thy steps, oh, proud bride and haughty bridegroom! Not for thee the fancied flight,

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not for thee the hoped-for elopement ! Nay, here thou art, and here shalt thou stay, until Time shall turn thee to two dry and doddering skeletons. For know, ha, ha ! 't is mine intent to lock thee in this deserted turret tower, where none may come to thine assistance save robust rats and mincing mice ! ”

As the speaker proceeded, he emerged from the arras and stood before us, in all his mocking, jeering, gibing humor, and we beheld our foe, our arch enemy, Habakkuk Hobbs !

All unarmed, I faced the villain. Unarmed, did I say ? Nay, for my fair love's arms wreathed themselves round my neck, and heartened by her soft touch, I faced the foe with an answering rage.

“ Habakkuk Hobbs,” I began, and my sharp voice cut him to the bone, “ I fear thee not ! As naught to me are thy dire threats. Thou'rt to my eyes but a worm, a hideous, crawling, squirming worm. And a worm's place is but on the ground ! ”

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With these scathing words, I knocked him fell to the floor, and, seizing his own pistol, I aimed it at his ill-favored villainous face.

But ere I fired on the dastardly hound, Berenice whispered :

“Hist ! the King approacheth ! Wait not to slay the horrid Hobbs, but fly with me ere yet we be o’ertook.”

I felt, perforce, the truth of her words, and all silently I clasped her hand and we fled adown the turret stair.

At the garden wall found we the ladder, placed by the faithful hand of good Queen Anne ; and as I, with the grace of the true-born courtier, assisted my lovely lady o’er the wall, I felt that a life of love and joy lay before us, and that henceforth happiness marked us for her own.

CHAPTER XII

THE RED ROSETTE

FELL was the night, sith it was past nightfall, and in the murky blackness I clasped my Berenice close, and whispered, "Canst wend a few paces? My coach awaits us at the postern gate."

"Aye," quoth she, but as we wended came one of a fierce wild countenance and evil visage.

"Who goes?" cried I, and a deep burly voice responded, "Plug Peter, the Pirate! Stand, or I lay thee low!"

"Stand I will," cried I in a towering fury, "but 't is thou shalt be laid low!" And thus speaking, I put one protecting arm round my trembling Berenice, and, grasping the wretch by his throat, I shook him till that his bones rattled; then flung him from me and sent him sprawling backward on the stony ground.

"Now, my lady," quoth I in exultant playfulness, "I have slain the buzzing gnat that would have bothered thee. Let us proceed unhindered on our journey."

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But, alas, we were counting the thaw before the snow. For even as I spake sounded a low, leering laugh as of hidden foes, and in a trice out from behind each currant-bush sprang a fierce-faced, full-armed, blood-thirsty pirate, with gore in his eye and a cutlass in his hand!

Bravely I fought the foe, and valiantly I struck at one after another of the black-souled, red-handed villains. Full many, too, I killed, their dead corpses lying about me as flies on a fly-paper.

But e'en though I hewed them down as speedily as might be, yet came they swarming so thick and fast that at last, though I shame to tell it, I was overcome and taken prisoner. Blame me not, oh, gentle reader, for though my staunch valor was in no way quelled, yet was I bleeding at every pore, both arms pierced through, and all bereft of weapons.

Struggling and screaming, I was borne aboard the pirate ship, and haled before Captain Redgore,



"I put one protecting arm round my trembling Berenice"

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the fiercest, boldest buccaneer that ever sailed a Spanish main.

“Odsbodikins!” he cried when he saw me, “a Prince, forsooth, a Royal Prince of the Blood! A prize well worth capturing, by’r lakins! An may’t please you, young sir, to sail under the Skull and Crossbones?”

“Confusion seize thee, thou minion!” I cried, and would have throttled him then and there but that I was restrained by a deckhand. “I sail not with thee or thine, and I demand freedom, or by the bones of my ancestors I will scuttle thy ship and drown thee and thy dastardly crew!”

“Mother o’ Monkeys, and Father o’ Fish!” cried old Captain Redgore, his bald head waving in the breeze, “by the Great Gherkins, thou art too bold, my boy! ’Tis but my whim that I do not slice off thy head inch by inch with my cutlass! ’Tis but that I reserve thee for a direr fate,—a deeper disgrace. To the hold with him, men, fling him in, and ram down the ramparts!”



"I would have throttled him but that I was restrained by a deckhand"

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The awful orders were obeyed, and overpowered by the brawny wretches of the pirate crew, Prince Abeniki Caldwell, the curled darling of King Henry's court, was lowered into a dark, dank, deep dungeon in the hold of the ship.

The reader cannot have forgotten the lovely Lady Berenice, who, all a-tremble at the sight of her attacked lover, stood shivering near by.

Unheeding the beautiful snow which fell on her bared head, she knelt plaintively before the biggest and gruffest of the pirates and plead for her lover's life.

"Stow that!" cried the pirate, who was not of polite manner, "and come along o' me, miss. My orders is to get you aboard afore we sail."

All reluctantly, the fair Berenice arose, and urged on by the grasping hand upon her arm, she stepped toward the ship.

Her gauzy gossamer gown and satin slippers were ill-suited to the snowstorm that was raging, but a worse storm was a-rage in her heart, and so heeded not she the elemental disturbance.



“Come along o’ me, miss”

ABENIKI CALDWELL

Once on board *The Laughing Hyena*, as the pirate ship was called, Lady Berenice repaired to her stateroom to repair her toilette and then sought the captain.

“Captain Redgore,” she began, falling on her knees before him, “I prithee, heed my prayer! As thou art a gallant gentleman and a courteous courtier, grant, I beseech thee, the paltry boon I ask.”

“Fair maiden,” quoth Redgore, “well hast thou divined my character! Of a truth am I a gallant noble, and as thy beauty likes me well, I henceforth take thee for my bride. Thank thy stars, girl, for this great good luck, for had I not favored thee thus, thou hadst been thrown to the sharks and that all speedily.”

“Nay,” quoth the lady, and the tears tripped adown her paling face, “I may not be thy bride, for that I am betrothed to another. But hear thou my prayer, oh, brave captain, and —”

Her monotonous voice was interrupted by

THE RED ROSETTE

Captain Redgore, who flew into a fierce rage as he exclaimed :



“ ‘Nay,’ quoth the lady, ‘I may not be thy bride’ ”

“ Sayest thou nay to me ? To me, the pirate captain of an hundred pirate ships ! Knowest thou

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not, thou foolish maiden, that those who cross me suffer a thousand tortures and die a direful death? Retract thy rash reply, and vow e'en now to be my bride, or by all the thunderbolts of the empyrean, thou shalt be doomed and condemned to the harsh and hideous torments known only to the bold bad buccaneers of *The Laughing Hyena*."

Lady Berenice blanched, but the Mog blood rushed to her face as she replied, "I defy thee! Never will I wed, save with my lordly lover, Prince Abeniki! As for thee, thou hateful fright, I spurn thee, and I fear not thy vaunted terrors!"

This speech was unwise, for it but goaded Captain Redgore into a worse fury than before. The ship shook beneath him as he opened his mouth to cry out orders for the punishment of the rash Lady Berenice.

But of such quick wit was the lady that even ere he spoke she perceived her error, and knew that she must hasten to repair it.

THE RED ROSETTE

“Stay, Sir Captain,” she cried gaily, and her eyes danced with roguish pleasantry. “Would’st thou expect of a fair lady to wed a man who cannot gaze on her without minding him of a hippopotamus?”

“Now who darest speak thus of thee, my Beauty,” cried Redgore, drawing his trusty cutlass, “let me at him, his life is his forfeit!”

“Ah, ha!” laughed the lovely Berenice, “use then thy weapon upon thyself, for ’tis thee of whom I speak. Thou canst not look at me except thou think of a hippopotamus.”

Long did Redgore gaze at the lady, striving to put the loathly animal out of his mind, yet could he not do so.

“Thou seest ’tis true,” cried Berenice, “so will I not marry such an one.”

“Ha, ’tis but to-day,” quoth Captain Redgore, knitting his great brows, “and but because thou hast spoke of the beast. An I see thee to-morrow, with no thought of aught but thee, wilt be mine?”

ABENIKI CALDWELL

“Aye,” quoth Berenice, as she hurried away to the splendid cabin which had been prepared for her reception.

Anon on the morrow, as the captain stalked the deck, he chanced upon the Lady Berenice sitting snugly in a steamer chair. “My love, my bride,” he murmured as he knelt beside her.

But as her merry gaze turned to him, he could not but bethink himself of the yesterday, and of the forbidden thought.

“Ha! a hippopotamus is in thy mind!” cried Berenice, and all unable to deny it, Captain Redgore strode sadly away.

On sped the days, and strive as he might, the pirate captain could not look at the lovely lady of his choice without bethinking him of the beast she had forbid, and stoutly she vowed none such rude gallant should be hers. Anon, in gay conversation would he forget the hippopotamus, but ever her roguish-meaning glance would recall it to his mind, and sulky and crestfallen would he retire to his cabin to weep alone.



"On the threshold she perceived her late lover, Prince Abeniki"

ABENIKI CALDWELL

The reader cannot have forgotten Prince Abeniki, who, starving and rat-eaten, lay languishing in the hold.

Yet one midnight, as the great ship plunged madly through the watery waves, the door of the Lady Berenice's cabin was burst roughly open and on the threshold she perceived her late lover, Prince Abeniki.

Late though he was, the Lady Berenice joyfully sprang to welcome her long-lost love.

"Hist!" he cried, in a low whisper, "not a word! There's mutiny toward,—the crew are even now burning the ship, and we must flee."

"Ha! say'st thou so?" quoth Lady Berenice. "Suffer me but to don my goloshes, and I will dive with thee to a deep and watery doom."

Stealthily we made our way to the halyard-deck, and then clasping my fair sweetheart in my strong arms I jumped the taffrail, and landed in the pitching, tossing, turbulent sea.

THE RED ROSETTE



“Clasping my fair sweetheart in my strong arms I jumped the taffrail”

“Abeniki,” murmured my Berenice, as, holding her fair form in one arm, I swam rapidly with the other, “where may we be?”

ABENIKI CALDWELL

I consulted my chart and quadrant.

“Of a truth,” I answered in surprise, “we are but threescore leagues from the coast of Coromandel! Heaven grant that we may reach there anon.”

We did so, but zounds, it was brave swimming! Berenice knew naught of the art, and hung, a dead weight, on my left arm. And though I boldly struck out with my right, yet was that somewhat hampered by reason of my cutlass, broadsword, and milady’s bandbox.

Howbeit, after some three days’ swimming we reached the coast of Coromandel and hastened at once to the telegraph office.

Forsooth it beseemed that after our dire mis-haps and fearsome misadventures, King Henry would forgive and forget his ire, and bid us return to his palace fireside a welcome son and daughter.

Trusting, therefore, in my sire’s loving, paternal heart, I telegraphed: “Berenice and I alive. Narrow escape. What shall I do?”

THE RED ROSETTE

All eagerly we awaited the answer. Though Berenice was hopeful, I was by way of being uncertain of my royal parent's fond welcome.

For naught could change the fact that my liege lady was even yet a lowly Mog, and though foreign travel and change of scene had done much for her, yet could it not blot the blot from her scutcheon.

With a heavy heart, then, I watched the messenger as he ambled up with the yellow paper on which hung all our hopes and fears. Eagerly I snatched it from his hand, tore it open, and read the brief message, "Hit her!"

Now though I had feared disinheritance, though I had scarce hoped for forgiveness, yet I was all unprepared for this base, rude message.

"Read it not, my love," I cried, as she would wrest the paper from my hand. "Read it not, but pay the price, and dismiss the minion who brought me desperation and despair."

Berenice gave the page a ruble and sent him packing, then turned to me.

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“Give it me,” she cried. “Am I not thy better half, thy bride-to-be?”

“Nay, read it not,” I begged, but feebly, for she would have it.

“Ha!” she cried, “’t is well, he bids us home! Abeniki, we must set sail at once.”

“Bids us home?” I cried. “What meanest thou? He bids me strike thee, which is to say, he ’ll have none of thee.”

“Not so,” cried my lady, her eyes wavering betwixt tears and smiles. “I paid the messenger but one ruble, hence the message is but one word, though ill ’t is writ. Come, my love, let us set out for the royal palace.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE CONFESSION OF CALLIMACHUS

ON we sped, our horses high-stepping o'er the gorse of the sand-dunes, and as the noonday sun sank above the horizon, I paused suddenly, for in my path I beheld the prostrate form of an Indian princess.

“Stay!” she cried, lifting her brown, bare arm, with its broad golden circlet. “Stay!”

And I stayed, yea, though my horse's hoofs were poised in mid-air above her feathered moccasins.

“List,” she continued, “these are the words of Alfarata, daughter of Opodeldoc, chief of the Ipecacuanhas. Ere to-night's moon may fall, the tribe, with tomahawks and arrows, will attack the white man and his fair lady. I, Alfarata, warn thee. Beware!”

“Indian maiden,” quoth I, and I gazed into her dark, bright orbs, “why is this iniquity? Wherefore would the red man harm his white brother?”

ABENIKI CALDWELL



“ My horse’s hoofs were poised in mid-air above her feathered moccasins ”

“ I know not,” she replied, and her sad, low voice was as the rippling of the Juniata at sunset, “ but it is ordered. Beware, oh, white

THE CONFESSION OF CALLIMACHUS

brother; turn yet to the sycamore tree by the marsh, and from there pace toward the rising sun. On, on, ere yet too late, and ask no more of Alfarata. Farewell."

In a whisper I told it all to Berenice, and spurring our horses we rode side by side across the plain. But even as we rode, I descried in the middle distance the approaching Indians.

Afoot on his horse stood Opodeldoc, chief of the Ipecacuanhas, and as he saw me he raised his hand with a menacing gesture.

"On, on," I cried, but though our noble steeds flew apace, 't was of no avail. The arrows of Opodeldoc came awhiz, and our horses were shot from beneath us.

"Ha!" I cried, "then 't is war to the knife!"

Giving Berenice my pistol, I bade her stand beneath the spreading sycamore and sell her life but dearly.

The noble girl stood as I avised her, and, casting but one glance at her sad sweet face, I plunged into the forest.

ABENIKI CALDWELL

Here I sat me down beneath another sycamore and waited.

The air was balmy and the song of the oriole sounded as music to mine ears.

The gentle breeze blew, the roses blew, and the fresh buttercups bloomed anon. A lark trilled, imperturbable, aye, to the verge of indifference, and as I sat I wondered. Wondered, forsooth, what might portend. For if the plan of interplanetary space be yet incompatible with the statute of limitation, who shall say what is, perforce, the inequitable? But, I reflected, *mors omnibus communis*, which is to say, there should be more omnibuses in this community,—then could we have made escape.

Even as I had foreseen came an Indian toward me. Slyly, stealthily came he through the forest, and I sat, outwardly calm, but within a raging eager heart and a good will to slay him. Slowly he crept, nearer and yet nearer, and ever nearer.

THE CONFESSION OF CALLIMACHUS



“Afoot on his horse stood Opodeldoc, chief of the Ipecacuanhas”

Still I sat still, for the time was not yet ripe,
and naught might urge me to hasten the fearful
onslaught which I well knew impended.

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“The noble girl stood as I avised her”

While I paused, he hesitated ; while I waited, he watched ; then, with a low, gurgling war-whoop, he sprang upon me and I slew him.

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"Slowly he crept, nearer and yet nearer"

ABENIKI CALDWELL

The whole tribe then came on with hoop-las and tomahawks. All silently they tied me to a tree with leather thongs and ropes, my mouth gagged open, and my ears nailed to a neighboring sycamore, and with blood-curdling yells they threw their tomahawks at me.

I waited until the tomahawks had whizzed through three-quarters of the distance between the Indians and me, for I was ever patient, then, with a sudden jerk which my nurse had taught me in my early infancy, I wrenched up the tree I was tied to, and ran away with it.

Berenice was awaiting me at the tryst, and though worn out with fear and exhaustion, she was still worth having, so together we again pursued our way.

A short walk of four and twenty leagues brought us to the palace, and entering, I boldly demanded audience with the King. I inquired also who might be Queen, and was not surprised to learn 't was Catherine Howard.

“Now I beseech thee, Sire,” I continued, as

THE CONFESSION OF CALLIMACHUS



“ With a low, gurgling war-whoop, he sprang upon me and I slew him ”

we sat gossiping o’er our mug of flip, “ grant but that I may marry my Berenice, and — ”

“ Berenice me no Berenices ! ” roared the King,
“ and Mog me no Moggses ! If thou weddest

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not

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not the bride I have chosen for thee, thou art henceforth no son of mine !”

“ And naught care I !” I cried, stung to desperation. “ None will I wed save Berenice Mog, my muddy lily, my bedraggled dove !”

Having thus spake, I incontinently left the royal presence and fled to Queen Catherine.

“ Have no fear, madam,” quoth I, as I entered her apartment, “ ’tis but thy long-lost son, returned to beg a favor of thee.”

“ Say on,” quoth Catherine, who was stately and icy of demeanor.

“ ’Tis but this,” I said on. “ I would engage thy helping hand for that the King hath set his foot down.”

“ Ha !” said she, “ and what may be toward ?”

Finding her thus sympathetic, I told her all, and in a raging fury she strode awkwardly about the room.

“ Now, by St. Runcible !” quoth she, “ ’t is a fine to-do an a man may not marry whom he list. Yet sith Henry is King, none may say

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him nay. Prince Abeniki, thy case is an hard one, yet is there a remedy. But of a troth 't is a difficult one."

"I' faith that irks me not," I cried. "Show me but the way, and all bravely will I tread it."

"Nay," quoth Catherine, deeply cogitating, "I fear me 't is of a wild and ill-conceived nature. Yet troth, 't would be most desirable."

"Name it, woman!" I roared, for I was ever choleric, and shilly-shallying held I in abomination.

Full frightened at my vehemence, Catherine cried out, "Name it I will! Faith, 't is but to kidnap the King!"

Now this was a good thing, and I set about with all haste to push it along.

"For," quoth I to myself, "King Henry being out of it, then will I, the rightful Prince, succeed to the succession."

I mulled it over with Berenice, as we wandered of a starlit eve beneath the lindens and the ilexes.

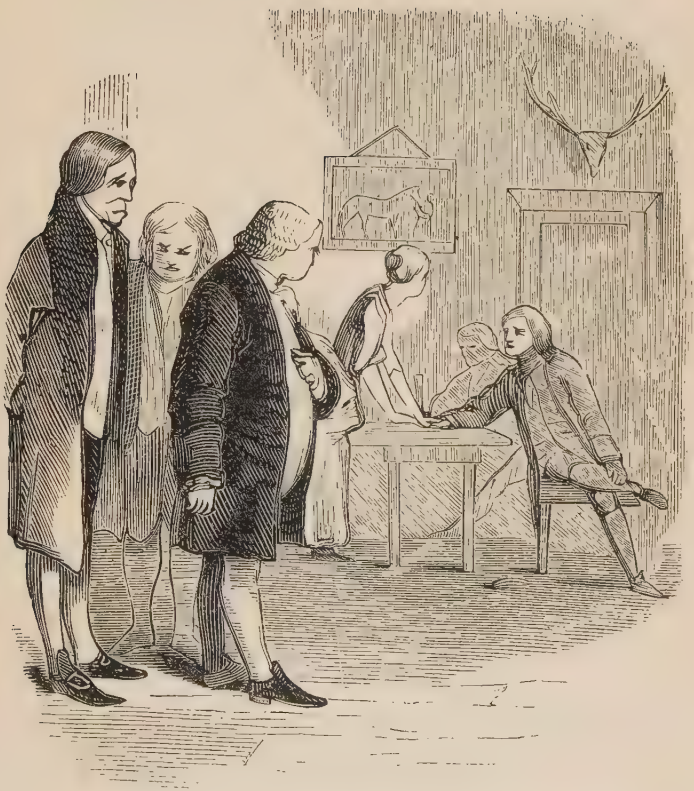
ABENIKI CALDWELL

“’Tis great,” quoth she. “How may it be done?”

“Foolish one,” quoth I, patting her paltry pate, “it may not be done for many moons. ’Tis too soon yet to think of ways and means. Secret conclaves must be held, spies sent out, leagues organized, minute-men stationed, treaties drawn up, faithful fellows found, and traitors beheaded. Ah, the kidnapping of a King is no trifling matter. You and I may be touched with eld and tottering round ’neath bald or gray heads ere yet King Henry be officially kidnapped.”

“Hast begun action?” asked Berenice, and by the grewsome glitter in her eye I well knew she approved not of delay.

“Aye,” I returned, “each midnight hold I conclave in a secret chamber of the turret tower. To me approach all stealthily Queen Catherine and three trusty colleagues, the Duke of Wellington, Sir Francis Bacon, and Robespierre. The password is ‘*Ignis via*,’ which



“ The Duke of Wellington, Sir Francis Bacon, and Robespierre ”

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means 'Fire away,' and unless the countersign be given, the intruder is shot dead."

"Aye, they be staunch men and true," quoth Berenice, but in a musing way, which I well knew betokened further parley.

"Howbeit," she went on, "such parlous slowness will I not abide. Nay, an it be needful, I will myself take the helm and steer the ship of state to a safe swift haven, or wreck it on the rugged rocks of revolution! The Duke of Wellington is but a court popinjay; Sir Francis Bacon but a learned bookworm; but Robespierre, aye, there's a man and a hero for you! Robespierre and Molly Mog! What can we not dare? What can we not do? My blood is fired! I go to fling defiance at the foe, kidnap the King, and place Abeniki upon the throne!"

Transformed into a very Goddess of War, my Berenice marched away, and returned anon with Robespierre.

He was a handsome young fellow, and 't was not altogether to my liking that my betrothed

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“ Robespierre ”

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should so forsake my counsels for his. Howbeit he was of a taciturn disposition, and spake not at all ; which earned for him the sobriquet of *Vox Clamantis*, or the voice of a clam.

But of a verity did he and Berenice contrive a speedy plan for the furtherance of our policy.

'T was naught, forsooth, 'but to enter the palace that very night, and with a posse of strong, brave men carry off the King and conceal him in a neighboring dungeon.

Ah, Robespierre was a statesman indeed ! Who else could have planned so safe and speedy an attack ? Beneath his martial cloak beat a brave, soldierly heart, and as he stood, with up-raised sword, giving orders, a dozen stalwart rebels gallantly obeyed, and a ponderous ladder was lifted to King Henry's very window. As befitted a Prince of the Blood, I entered first, close followed by Robespierre.

King Henry was sleeping soundly, which is to say with a great deal of sound, and as I listened and as I watched the frank, open face



"A ponderous ladder was lifted to King Henry's very window"

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of my monarch I well-nigh repented me of my fell purpose, and would have softly departed but for Robespierre, who stood plucking at my doublet sleeve.

“Odzooks, man!” he made whisper, “art turned coward? To’t, I prithee; ’t will need us all to move yon flesh-mountain.”

To’t we went, and of a troth, the brawny fellows had great to-do to move the sleeping King. Yet tugged they yarely, and ere the castle clock tolled the hour were we again in the courtyard, our precious burden bound and gagged, but still sleeping.

Silently we loaded him into a wagon which stood in waiting.

Cr-r-k! and in a moment the vehicle was but a mass of broken wood, and the unconscious King stirred slightly as he fell among the *débris*.

Another wagon and a stronger one was supplied, yet met it the same fate.

Alas, were we to be thwarted of our purpose by reason of the King’s avoirdupois?

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We held confab. The Duke of Wellington considered, and therewhile knit his ducal brows.

“’Tis a weighty subject,” quoth he, “and deserveth deep thought.”

“Subject? Nay,” quoth Sir Francis Bacon, “’tis but a weighty King.”

But I turned me to Robespierre.

“What is to do?” said I briefly.

“*En avant!*” he responded, and his frowning eyebrows met across his rugged nose.

“In a van!” I repeated. “’Tis wise counsel!” And with all haste I hied me to a near-by hostler.

“Give me thy van,” I cried, “thy largest moving-van.” And in a trice we filled it with the King and drove it away in triumph.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TRICOLOR OF LORRAINE

NOW after that the van-load of King had departed, the Duke of Wellington holding the ribbons, and Sir Francis Bacon beside him on the box, turned I to my trusty friend, Robespierre, mine eyes agog with grateful thanks.

“Thou shalt be my prime minister when that I am crowned,” I cried, and he knelt and kissed my buskin in token of worship and fealty.

Then hied we to the palace, and Robespierre ran before me crying, “Make way for King Abeniki!”

Proudly then I walked to the throne-room. Proudly I took my seat in the great chair which had been all too tight a fit for my royal sire.

Though not yet officially crowned, still was I the rightful heir, the next in succession, and in King Henry’s absence, who but I must rule the state?

Entered Queen Catherine. “Ha! mother,” quoth I, from the King’s chair, “Queen Dowager thou art, and I beseech of thee thy diadem

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for the fair head of my bonny bride, Queen Berenice."

"Ha!" quoth Queen Catherine, "what meaneth this?"

"Henry is missing," I replied, "hence the succession is up to me."

"Is't so?" asked the ex-Queen, much interested. "Then must I order me some new visiting-cards. My crown is on my dressing-table. Take it for thy bride, Queen Berenice, and my blessing with it. Adieu, I hie."

"By my troth, she is an amiable old soul," thought I, "and vastly accommodating. But now must I attend to affairs of state."

Alas, even as I turned me to my secretary came the sound of martial music and the clatter of a gay cavalcade.

I watched with paling face and quaking heart the splendid pageant that now entered the throne-room.

My blood stood still in my veins; my heart bounded to my throat, and then fell with a thud

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to my boots, as I saw, led by a squad of gorgeously appavelled nobles, a new King approach. Robed, crowned, decorated, he was indeed every inch a King, and yet, oh, how may I declare it? and yet, the fiend in regal regalia was none other than that heinous hound, that vile, vicious villain — Habakkuk Hobbs!

I was somewhat annoyed to see this thing, but being of a disdainful and supercilious nature, I glanced at Hobbs carelessly, and said in tones of deep indifference, “Art King?”

“Aye,” said Hobbs, “the private papers of our late lamented Henry prove me to be his eldest son, and therefore his worthy successor.”

“Now, marry beshrew me!” thought I to myself, “but, of a troth, the jig is up. Verily doth it then behove me to warn my Lady Berenice and escape while yet we may to her father’s castle at Bois-Bracy, or eke to the hospitable Inn of Moses Mog.”

But all too late were my able and well-laid plans. With a fanfaronade of trumpets and a

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sickening display of pomp and ceremony, the obnoxious Hobbs seated himself on the royal throne and took his sceptre in hand.

“Hail!” cried the courtiers, as he began to reign. “Hail King Habakkuk I.!”

Now was I of a mixed mind whether to give fight to the base usurper, or by apparent truckling to his ill-gotten authority make way for a later and surer attack. I conferred privately with Robespierre, who, being a man of action, was for immediate warfare.

Yet still did I hesitate. I looked into the next room, and there saw I my liege lady, my Berenice, holding pleasant converse with Catherine, the Queen Dowager.

All unwitting were they of Hobbs's triumph; all confident of the coming joy and happiness of the reign of King Abeniki and Queen Berenice. Should I, then, tamely submit to a catastrophe which would work them woe and disaster? Nay, a thousand nays! Calling Robespierre to my side I made a dash for the throne, and hurling

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Habakkuk Hobbs to the floor, I lifted high my booted and spurred right foot and sent the villain flying.

“Treason! Treason!!” cried a thousand voices in well-trained chorus.

“Nay,” I replied, and my low, soft voice resounded above the deafening clamor of the conspirators, “here is the traitor! His the treason!” I picked Hobbs up by his belaced ruff, and shook him at the infuriated mob.

“Take this demon of vainglory, crush him to earth, tear him limb from limb, scatter him to the four winds of heaven, and then return as loyal subjects of your royal champion! Return, to serve and bless King Abeniki!”

“Aye,” chimed in Robespierre, “Abeniki, the gallant hero, who e’en now hath saved you from a blood-thirsty tyrant! The chivalric knight who yet shall proudly rule and reign the noble country left desolate by the sudden taking-off of King Henry VIII. of glorious memory! Greet him, ye curs! Sound the cymbals! Hail the

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"In a moment I was captured and chained"

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King! Long life and long reign to His Royal Highness, King Abeniki!"

Robespierre's eloquence gained the day. With one voice (mine) the people shouted, "Hail to King Abeniki!"

But even as I triumphed Hobbs sprang at me, hurled me from the throne, and, clapping the crown on his head, said quietly:

"Yon is a madman! See to 't that he be put in chains and cast into a deep and noisome dungeon beneath the donjon keep."

"Aye, aye, Sire!" responded a dozen brawny soldiers, and in a moment I was captured and chained, while my triumphant rival sneered blackly at me.

"Ha!" shouted Habakkuk Hobbs, for King will I not call him, "*veni, vidi, vici!*"

"Aye," said I bitterly, "of a truth art thou vain, invidious, and vicious, but beware, oh, Habakkuk Hobbs!"

"Thine is the throne to-day!
To-morrow, who may say?"

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With this dire poetic threat I stalked haughtily away, as one whose mind was occupied with loftier thoughts.

“*Quo vadis?*” quoth the Lady Berenice, who met me in the outer corridor.

“To a dungeon cell,” I replied, with that nobility of demeanor which ever marked my discourse, “but weep not, fair maiden. I will return to thee anon, and though it may be a score of years hence, though our locks be whitened and our eyes bedimmed, yet is Time naught to those who love, and full well do I know thy constant loyal heart will beat but for thine own Abeniki.”

“Aye,” quoth the maiden, “truly hast thou judged me! And yet more loving and loyal am I than thou deem’st. Not only will I await thee, my royal lover, but I, too, will go to a dungeon, there to stay in solitude and despair until that we both be liberated.”

This consoled me greatly, and I preserved a cheerful demeanor as the guards escorted me to

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my cell, and thrusting me, gyved and fettered, inside, locked and barred the great stone door.

At her own piteous request, Lady Berenice was kindly allowed to be incarcerated also.

King Habakkuk was loth to sanction this, but the lady vowed she would wed him else, where-upon a small dark dungeon was allotted for her use.

Verily, the bare, stone cell was a poor setting for so lovely a jewel as my Lady Berenice, but of such leal, loving heart was she that 't was more her joy to abide in such wise as did her lover than to feast royally in the King's household.

Moreover, my lady spent most of her waking hours in slumber, and thus was she free from fear of rude interruption, for none came ever to her cell, save to pass a crust through the grated window.

The weeks waxed and waned, and all their lives might they have in their cells abidden but that one day, of an inadvertence, did Abeniki Caldwell glance out of his dungeon window.

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There saw he a strange figure driving by with
a mettlesome steed.



“My lady spent most of her waking hours in slumber”

“Ha!” quoth a voice in an inaudible whisper,
“would’st escape?”

“Aye,” replied Abeniki, “for though I be
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well content, yet am I of a restless nature, and this quietude irketh me ! ”

“ Knowest thou me not ? ” again whispered the voice, and Abeniki once more gazed from his grating.

“ Now, by the trip-hammer of St. Tosti, well do I know thee ! ” he cried. “ Surely thou art none other than my old-time friend and gossip, Jack Pudding ! ”

“ Well hast thou divined, ” cried the Scaramouch, capering about in joy, “ but say no word more. An thou desirest, I will come again at the hour o’ midnight, and take thee away in this my chariot. ”

“ Aye, do so, ” I replied. “ Full well would it please me again to breathe the outer air. But what news o’ the court ? Is Habakkuk Hobbs still on the throne ? How fares my lovely Berenice ? Where is the Queen Dowager ? ”

“ Peace, peace ! ” quoth Jack Pudding. “ I may not stay ; but anon will I return and then will I tell thee all. ”



“ A strange figure driving by with a mettlesome steed ”

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I heard the departing roll of his chariot wheels, and then heard I a sound that made my heart flutter as a caged bird.

I listened again : truly 't was a sound of laughter, of low, merry laughter, and by my halidome 't was the laughter of my Berenice.

“Odzooks, man !” quoth I to myself, “thou’rt dreaming ! Berenice of Bois-Bracy is, ere this, returned to one of her fathers, or wed to some hated rival of thine.”

Thus I spake, for my long, weary solitude had made me of sad and sorry temper.

Yet again heard I that soft, angelic laugh, as of a merry maiden, and then, even as I wondered, the door of my dungeon was flung wide and to me entered my gaoler leading by the hand my long-lost love, my bonny blithe Berenice !

“Good-day,” quoth I, for I was ever courteous of address. “Art mine, madam ?”

“Yea,” quoth she, “and by base bribery have I prevailed on this, our gaoler, to let me hold converse with thee. Thou knowest well I was



“ Leading by the hand my long-lost love, my bonny blithe Berenice ”

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ever quick of wit ; and methinks I have now devised a plan whereby we may reinstate ourselves in royal favor and yet live a happy life."

"'T is well," I said, "and if thy plan includeth our departure from these dungeons, yet may I assist thee. For at twelve o' the clock cometh one with steed and chariot to take me from here. Wilt go with me, my love, my bride-to-be?"

"Aye," said Berenice, with all her old-time simplicity of speech, and in silence we waited the arrival of Jack Pudding.

The gaoler demurred somewhat at our informal departure, but I counselled him to wiser mien.

"Know, varlet," quoth I, "so soon as I may perfect my lady's plans, and execute them, then shall I be in power ; and certes, I will not forget thee."

This pleased the old fellow, and anon came Jack Pudding.

Though clownish of aspect, the jester was of good manners and golden heart, and with all

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care he tucked my lady into his humble cart and we made ready for the journey.

On the way Berenice unfolded her plans.

Like all of my lady's stratagems and conspiracies, 't was beautiful in its simplicity. For 't was but to reinstate King Henry on his throne, thus deposing the vile usurper, Habakkuk Hobbs.

"But," quoth I, "Henry refused us our union. Think'st thou he will still prove unyielding?"

"Nay," quoth Berenice, with determination in her either eye, "for that we will bargain with him aforetime. If that he smileth on our nuptials, so will we restore him to his kingdom. Marry! I fear him not."

CHAPTER XV

THE SOMNAMBULIST OF THE MONASTERY

TOWARD nightfall, then, came we anear the palace, and, passing the town-pump, saw a noticing pasted thereon.

“Halt!” cried I to my charioteer, “I would read this saying.”

But ere I could spell out its meaning came forth a noble from the palace to pump water.

“How,” quoth I, “doth King Habakkuk regale his courtiers but with water?”

“Aye,” replied the man, who was of a sour visage and surly, “though the King all greedily bibbeth him his wine, yet are his gentlemen condemned to *absence d’esprit*.”

“Absence of spirits?” quoth I. “’T is indeed a pity. Ah, this growing curse of temperance! *In rerum naturâ*, which is to say, ‘In rum man showeth his true nature.’ By the beard of St. Barbican, were I King this should ne’er be thus!



"A noble from the palace came to pump water"

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But what portendeth this inkling here? Read me it, an thou wilt."

"That but setteth forth," quoth the nobleman, "a reward which hath been offered for the return of King Henry VIII. He hath now been lost or mislaid upwards of a twelvemonth, and sore do we lament his loss, and much regret the wicked reign of King Habakkuk."

"Ha!" quoth Abeniki Caldwell, and his eyes shone with a suppressed glitter. "Reward sayest thou? Of a troth, how much may it be?"

"'Tis a matter of five hundred rubles," said the noble gentleman, "and 'tis offered by the courtiers without the knowledge of King Habakkuk. If, perchance, he walketh this way, so is the writing removed till that he be gone."

"Now, by the Mass!" cried Abeniki Caldwell, "an I restore unto ye King Henry VIII., is this reward to me?"

"Aye," quoth the noble, "and that all gladly. Give us again our King Henry, and to thee shall



"The two beauteous, high-born ladies sped o'er the plain"

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be all honor as champion and defender of this loyal lawless land."

"Now, by the scarlet snuff-box of St. Saturnalia," cried Abeniki Caldwell, "mine is it to pluck the handsome Henry from his hiding-place! Mine is it to restore to a pleading people their proud and ponderous sovereign! Berenice, my aid, my strong right arm, attend and assist me!"

The Lady Berenice was at her lover's side in a flash, and her hair-trigger intellect had already worked out the problem.

"Hist!" she cried. "Abeniki, 'tis mine to dictate, thine to obey! Summon to me Queen Catherine, the Dowager!"

'T was done, and, mounting horse, the two beauteous, high-born ladies sped o'er the plain.

"Follow!" called Lady Berenice, and Abeniki Caldwell bounded to saddle and gave chase.

Anon fell the evening shades and wrapt the multitudinous mysteries of manifold matter in a murky gloom.

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“Halt!” cried the Lady Berenice, and the pursuing party paused before a lowly cabin and stealthily peeped in at the oriel windows.

What a sight met their eager and exultant gaze! In the humble plebeian cot sat King Henry VIII., all hungrily supping at the hospitable but meagre board of the Widow Wicks! Queen Catherine wept as she viewed her royal spouse. Sadly had the noble form of the King diminished. Ill-fed, unnourished, his noble weight had reduced itself by half, and but the frame remained of one who had erstwhile been a picture of health and prosperity. Albeit notwithstanding the shrinkage, greatly did we desire all that remained of King Henry VIII., and bidding the ladies wait outside in the coach, I burst in at the cabin-door, and cried:

“Father, dear father, come home with me now!”

In glad acquiescence arose King Henry and sought his hat, but to my sore surprise the amiable landlady, o’ercome at thought of

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losing her paying guest, flew into a mad passion, crying :



“ Supping at the hospitable but meagre board of the Widow Wicks ”

“Not so! Nay, thou shalt not take the man away! To King Habakkuk have I pledged my word, and maugre my head, here must King Henry stay!”

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“Peace, woman !” I cried. “If that thou retardest in any way soever the King’s departure, so will I shoot thee and thy bonny babe.”

I drew my revolver, and in a fluttering fear the Widow Wicks cried out :

“Nay, shoot not ! And faith, there be no need ! Born of a lion-hearted race, think’st thou I betray my sovereign for my child ? Ha ! know that the Wickses were ever a valiant house ! And rather than see King Henry on the throne I perish willingly, aye, I and mine, and thou and thine !”

I heeded not her frenzied speech till that she referred to mine own person, then looked I about me.

By the boots of St. Barnabas, the woman was a fiend, and even now was her humble cot all a-blaze !

“Fire !” I remarked, in calm, stentorian tones, and gently lifting the sleeping babe from its cradle, I stalked proudly out.

King Henry followed, and mounting our *hors*

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de combat, which is to say our war-horses, we plunged madly away on the road to the palace.

Anon held we confab as we raced at hot speed across the sandy dunes.

“An I restore thee to thy throne,” I said, “wilt thou sanction my marriage to the Lady Berenice?”

“’Tis nor time nor place to discuss affairs of state,” quoth King Henry, his brows darkling as he gave spur to his panting steed.

“By the dirk of St. Dunstan, now and here shalt thou make decision!” cried I. “An thou forbiddest the banns atween my Berenice and me, verily shalt thy bald head find its next resting place on the bed-rock of yon yawning chasm!”

Now though King Henry VIII. was an indolent man as might ever be, a veritable *lèse majesté*, which is to say a lazy king, yet was he ever agog for a fray; so looked he down into the chasm, which by my baldric was no less than a score of leagues in depth, and fiercely cried he:



“ ‘ So will I shoot thee and thy bonny babe ! ’ ”

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“Ingrate! on the brink of this precipice will I fight thee, and so be it that whoever of us may conquer, him shall the Lady Berenice wed.”

“Ha!” cried I, “sits the wind in that quarter?” for though I knew of King Henry’s kindly courtesy toward all ladies, yet did I resent his mention thus of my Berenice.

“Aye,” cried King Henry, “come on, save that thou art a coward! Fair fight will I make for a fair lady, and if be that I win, Queen Berenice shall proudly grace my throne!”

“And if be that *I* win?” said I, staring all haughtily at my sire.

“Then ill omens dog ye both!” he cried, and had at me as I stood all unprepared on the very brink of the abyss.

“Now the evil demon fly away with thee if I send thee not to the fate thou deservest!” quoth I, as I lunged at him in a frenzy of fierce anger.

Dancing with rage, King Henry waltzed too near the edge of the precipice, and ere that I



“ Gently lifting the sleeping babe, I stalked proudly out ”

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might warn him he lost his footing and, grabbing me by the legging, we fell all headlong into the depths below.

Down we fell, and down ; hours seemed it ere we reached the mossy banks on which at last we rested.

“ ’T is well,” quoth the King, stumbling to his feet, “ so is mine honor satisfied. Embrace me, my Abeniki, son and Prince ! And now let us hie homeward, that I may resume my royal reign and bless thy nuptials with the court-lady, the Princess Berenice.”

O’ercome with grateful emotions, I said no word, and we began all silently to climb the rocky cliff. ’T was a rude climb, and withal a long one. Ever and anon would we slip and roll tumbling to the bottom again.

Yet at last we stood, hale and whole, on the palace road once more, and by a fleet foot-race soon arrived we at the palace gate.

With din of drums and toot of trumpets were we received. Hurrahing hordes hailed King



"We began all silently to climb the rocky cliff"

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Henry VIII. and Prince Abeniki, welcoming their return with mirth and martial music.

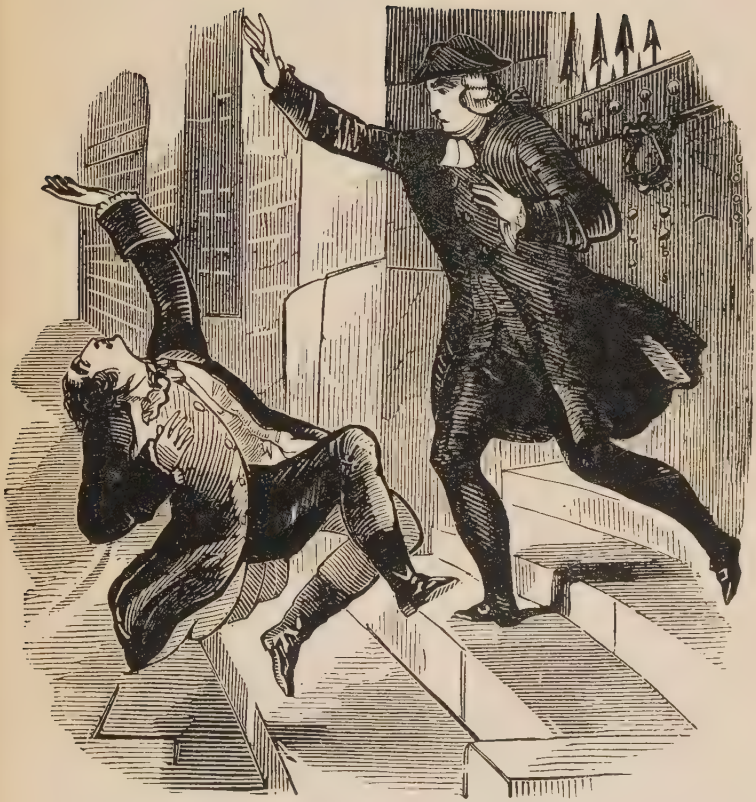
Queen Catherine and the Princess Berenice advanced to give us greeting, and all went merry as a marriage-bell till that I spied the evil visage of the uncrowned villain, Hobbs, stealthily approaching the palace gate.

“Remove him, but gently,” quoth King Henry, who had resumed his olden time demeanor which made ever for peace and plenty.

“Trust it to me, sire,” said a voice of deep intonation, and as I gazed, Cardinal Wolsey gave the fellow such a blow as sent him spinning down the castle steps to the paved courtyard beneath.

Yet was I not satisfied : for well I knew of Hobbs’s persistent nature, and sore feared I that he would yet return to intrude upon the bliss of our happy family tree.

And so stirred this fear in my mind that I stole out unobserved, and taking but one trusty retainer, I mounted horse and gave chase



“ Such a blow as sent him spinning down the castle steps ”

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to the currish hound who ever haunted my happiness.

On we flew, o'er miles of rocky desert, and as we neared a dismal swamp saw we the dark, sinister face of Hobbs looming behind a tree.

I leaped at him, and my fierce war-horse sent him sprawling.

"Base fiend!" I cried, as I dismounted and addressed him. "Thy time is come. Thy fate be on thine own head. Here will I fight thee to the death!"

Ever in my long and luxurious after-life was I gloriously proud of this my noble attitude toward my foe.

I might, forsooth, have spun him swirling on my sword; I might have trampled out his vile, worthless life with my charger's hoofs; but I chose, aye, chose of my own free unvarnished will to offer him brave and honorable fight.

And by the Gorging Giasticutis, what a fight it was!



"I leaped at him, and my fierce war-horse sent him sprawling"

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No puny weakling had I for antagonist, but a brawny giant, and eke one well skilled in arts of war. And of a truth, though a brave fighter myself, no sooner felt I a few blows from his iron arm than I knew of a surety I had met my master.

Boldly I fought, yet it was with an anguished heart, as one who cherisheth a forlorn hope.

“Ha!” hissed Hobbs, beneath his bated breath, “ha! thou varlet! This time am I conqueror, and when that I have finished thee will I return in triumph and merrily wed the lovely Lady Berenice. Ha! how likest thou that, my boy?”

Fain would I have struck the craven across his lying lips but that I felt my last remnant of strength ebbing, my eyes closing, and a stupor as of death creeping o’er me.

“Aye,” jeered Hobbs as he purposely prolonged my agony that he might gloat upon it, “aye, within the hour shalt thou be lying stark and stiff among the rushes, whilst I lead to

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the altar a flower-crowned bride, a smiling, blushing damsel, yclept Berenice !”

“Knave ! thou liest !” cried a voice, and my senses reeled as I recognized the loved accents of my betrothed.

Like an avenging goddess the Lady Berenice came ; storming with wrath, blazing with anger, albeit encouraging me to one last effort by her loving, lovely voice.

“Rise, my Abeniki,” she cried, “renewed strength is thine ! Clutch thou the throat of the pagan dog before thee, and fling him headlong to his just and well-deserved doom !”

At the voice of my loved one, my energies awoke anew.

“Die ! thou craven minion !” I shouted, and with a Herculean hurl I cast the fulsome form of Habakkuk Hobbs crashing down to the seething depths below.

With a last glance at the fell fellow, I turned me to my lovely lady, who stood blushingly awaiting my approach.

[287] “Sweetheart,”

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*“ With a Herculean hurl I cast the fulsome form of Habakkuk Hobbs
crashing down to the seething depths below ”*

“ Sweetheart,” quoth I, and my blue eyes
gazed all deeply into her own, “ now is removed
the last barrier ; now hath departed our only foe ;

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henceforth is our way bestrewn with flowers and besprent with happiness. Art glad, my own, my only love ? ”

“ Aye,” quoth she, her fair face flecked with smiles.

“ And wilt always love me ? ” I continued, as I clasped her to my heart. “ Wilt be ever leal and true to thine own Abeniki ? Wilt love me with increasing fervor even until the darksome day shall dawn, as dawn it must, whose setting sun shall see Abeniki Caldwell departed for that distant burn from which no traveller returneth ? ”

“ Aye,” responded Lady Berenice, and a tear trickled adown her blooming cheek, “ even to thy dying day will I devotedly adore thee, and when that thou art gone forever, then verily will I become the wife of King Henry VIII.”

And the sad sunset glow enveloped the pair in a heliotrope halo, while the rosy dawn of night faintly tinged the pale horizon.



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